

The Phantom Army

BEING THE STORY OF A MAN
AND A MYSTERY

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OF THE JESTERS" ETC



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I would take this opportunity of saying that "The Phantom Army" is an attempt to depict the emprise of a man who is a victim of the Napoleonic idea. In this endeavour, I have sought to show what might be achieved by a regiment of determined men harboured by a lawless province, befriended by a people ripe for revolution, and so organized that in every country of Europe a refuge from the law and the police is open to them.

That a soldier accustomed to the reckless liberty of the hills, a soldier who believes that, as Napoleon did, so may others do, should achieve something of his ambition, is, I hope, no improbable assumption. That he would achieve much is beyond all bounds of military probability. It has been my endeavour in "The Phantom Army" to show how far such a man might hope to go, and what would be the causes which ultimately would contribute to his downfall. In this work I owe much to the assistance

of many military friends, who assure me that the successes of Lorenzo de la Cruz are neither beyond the limit of possible achievement, nor are successes which any adventurer equipped as this Spaniard was equipped might not accomplish in Europe to-morrow.

It remains to be said that in Books I. and II. the White Hussars are described from the point of view of the stranger and the new recruit. The remaining Book is, in some measure, the outcome of actual conspiracies known to the Civil Guards of Spain during the last five years.

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BOOK I

The Man

CHAPTER I

A WOMAN STANDING IN THE STREET

A STREET of Bayswater—an interminable street; the hour, two o'clock of the morning; the month, June; the year, 1893. And in the silence of this street, a woman crying for help.

There had been a lull of the breeze when first the man heard the cry, but now the gust came again to blow his cape about his ears, and to send him cringing to the doorstep of a house for shelter. For a moment the gas lamps went black before the blast; leaves and paper were whirled almost to the upper windows of the houses; a hurricane raged, and the woman's voice was lost in it. But at the ebb of the wind, the listener heard the cry for the second time, and in the same instant saw the woman standing at the open door of a house upon the opposite side of the way. It was plain to him at once that she was greatly agitated, and in deep distress, for she turned often to look, now up and down the street, now into the dark hall behind her. Once, indeed, she raised her voice to a high pitch, crying, "Help, help!" but immediately upon this she returned to the hall, and when

he crossed the road, the door was already shut, and all was silence.

He crossed the road, and stood wondering before the house. In outward shape as the other dwellings about, a Georgian monument to artistic imbecility, it was unlighted, as its fellows; silent as they were silent, gaunt as they were gaunt, a tower of ugliness to harbour the willing sleepers who lived in the mournful street. Save for a faint glow of light shining upon the ceiling of the hall—as you could observe through the skylight of the front door—there was no indication whatever that man or woman moved in that abode of gloom. Yet Falconer had seen a woman come out of it; had heard her cry for help; had watched her look up and down the street, as though seeking a friend and ally of the night. And even as he saw her, a woman of majestic height, and, he judged instinctively, a young woman, he knew that London at last had put a mystery in his path.

Long he listened for any sound from the house; a moan of the wind alone answered him. He looked down the terrible street; its pavements glistened still with the rain of the earlier hours; but no living being trod them. Curiosity rooted him to the spot. He had the impulse to knock at the door, and to ask the woman if he could be of service to her.

It may be, but for the moment's delay, that he would not have brought his courage to the point, that he would have lighted another cigar, and gone at length to his own house with curiosity still high strung. Those are questions which he did not reflect upon, for he had been standing but a couple of minutes when the door was opened for the second time, and the woman ran out almost into his arms.

She wore a dress of grey silk with red at the shoulders—a gown that had the stamp of Paris and not of Bayswater upon it. Jewels glittered upon her pretty white neck, and a tiara of diamonds flashed in the curls of her jet-black hair. His surmise as to her height was confirmed when he found that she stood well above his shoulder—the shoulder of Noel Falconer, whom brother officers in the Hussars used to call “length without breadth.” But of her face he could see nothing, for little white hands covered it, and checked the sobs which shook her. That her distress was genuine he had no manner of doubt. Yet how she came there, dressed like that, at such an hour of morning, he knew no more than the dead.

“Madame,” he said, stepping out of the shadows suddenly, “you seem to be in some trouble.”

She did not notice him upon the instant; but he heard her say again and again in French which had the charm of a Southern accent:

“Oh, what shall I do! how shall I help him?”

Vague as the cry was, it won the man’s pity; he made bold to touch her arm.

“Madame,” he said, “you are ill, and have no business to be standing here. Even I am cold, and I wear a thick coat.”

She looked up at the words, and observed him for the first time. A more stately or noble creature he had never seen in all his life. And her voice did not lie to him. The warm light of youth shone in her brilliant eyes—was painted upon her pretty lips and flushing face. He thought then that she was an Austrian; nowhere out of Vienna had he met one who stood so well for all the dignity and grace of womanhood. In this surmise as to country he was wrong, but he did

not know that he was wrong until days had passed, and he had seen strange cities and strange men.

"Let me implore you to return to your house," he continued, while she stood shivering and watching him with curious eyes. "If I can be of any service there, do not hesitate to ask me. My name is Noel Falconer, and I was a captain in the 10th Hussars three months ago. You are a stranger, I see; but you will find my arm stronger than my French, if you have need of it."

Not until that moment, he was sure, did she awake to the fact that she stood in the street without cloak or hat, and that a stranger talked to her. But now, swiftly, his words recalled her to the truth, and she turned to him imploringly.

"Monsieur," she said in a low and gentle voice, "a very great crime had been committed in that house to-night. I have no right to ask you, but will you go in with me? There is one dead there, and I cannot go alone."

He stepped back a pace and looked at her. For an instant he thought that she was amusing herself with him, but the heaving breast, the tears still upon her cheek, the quivering mouth forbade such a thought.

"Madame," he exclaimed, "you may count upon me in all things. I am ready to come with you now. Perhaps you would not wish others to know of this?"

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed, a spasm as of fear passing over her troubled face, "I do not wish that. They must know nothing; you will not tell them—you will not speak of these things."

He protested that her secret would be well kept, and was reiterating the promise, when a footstep, echoing in the distance, cut short his words. She heard it, too, and taking his hand timidly and with the air of one

who feared to go alone, she drew him into the hall of the house and closed the door softly behind her. Noel Falconer had been in many a situation of peril in his adventurous life; but never, truly, did such a sense of hidden danger take possession of him as at that moment when the street door of the unknown woman's house closed upon him, and they were face to face, Heaven knew with what tragedy or terrible deed of the night.

The silence, the hour, the suggestion of some mystery, the strange manner of the woman's appearance in the street, the words he had heard from her lips, and had regarded until this time as the ravings of hysteria—all these were at war with nerves shaken by long months of misfortune and of trouble. He shuddered to remember that she had spoken of a dead man lying there in the house. An overwrought and weary brain so played with him that if a hand had been stretched out from the darkness of the hall to touch him, he would have cried out as a child in the terror of a dream.

These things he recalled afterwards with some little shame. Courage is much a matter of circumstance, and circumstance was to prove so strange a friend to him that he never hesitated to speak freely of his first meeting with one who changed the course of his life at an hour when life seemed to have no other gift for him. And it was a strange circumstance indeed that, within ten minutes of his first meeting with Isabella de Gavarnie, they should have come together to the hall of a house in Bayswater, hand in hand, as children upon a quest, the man, it may be, more terrified than the woman, yet both in their hearts fearing that the darkness was the shield of some momentous mystery

from which the light would send them trembling presently.

It was a large hall, wide and lofty, and giving upon a staircase of finer proportions than the man had looked for in such a house. A glimmer of gas upon the landing showed him many pictures in heavy frames, and a star of swords which caught the feeble rays, and cast them back in points of fire. But the hall itself was in darkness; and such grey light of a summer's night as the street vouchsafed was here lost to them.

He could scarce see the face of the woman—could distinguish nothing of his surroundings, though the soft carpet beneath his feet spoke of luxury and of wealth. In all that great house no sound, save the ticking of a clock, and the deep breathing of his companion, whose hot hand touched his own, was to be heard. If a tragedy had been played, assuredly the actors now rested. Yet where should he look for them—where lay the mystery of which she had spoken? So scared was he that the thought of stumbling upon the dead man in the darkness of the hall froze his very heart.

"Do you wish me to enter one of these rooms with you?" he asked in a deep whisper, while the woman stood fear-stricken and irresolute. "Was it here that it happened?"

"Yes, yes, it was here," she answered quickly, dragging him towards a door upon his left hand. "I returned from South Audley Street at half-past one and heard them quarrelling—my brother and his friend. It happened then. Oh, God help me, what shall I do?"

His hand was upon the knob when she spoke. He felt her instinctive gesture which would have dragged

him back from the place as from the scene of dreadful sights. But at the mention of a quarrel—a human thing at the worst—he took heart and began to remember that they had called him the strongest man in his regiment. After all, if there were but one other in the house, he could very well take the risk of meeting with him. Yet he would have given much to have had a revolver in his hand; and when he threw open the door of the room and saw that it was in darkness, his courage went trickling away like water from a cracked jar.

“Madame,” he said, standing suddenly and facing her, “how many are in this house with you?”

She listened a moment before answering, as though some sounds would give her words.

“Except my servants, there are none,” she whispered presently. “I cannot—I dare not speak to them. And I have no right to ask you.”

“You have a woman’s right, which is the best right,” he said, feeling in his pocket for a match. “If you will remain here a moment, I will see what this room has to tell us.”

“You must not go alone,” she protested, but he loosed her hand and left her standing, a pitiful figure of fear and distress, in the gloomy light of the alcove. The wan and feeble rays of the wax match aggravated the darkness of the great room into which he now stepped. For an instant he beheld his own face, white and hollow-eyed in a mirror above a buffet, and that gave him such a start that he dropped the match and was in darkness again.

“What is it? What do you see?” she asked from her place at the door.

“I see my own face,” said he with the poorest

attempt possible to conceal from her his dread of the room and of that which he believed it to contain.

"You have another match," she exclaimed in a whisper which betrayed her impatience.

"I have a boxful," said he, and with that he struck a light for the second time, and held it up that he might discover the chandelier; but there was a draught as from an open window in the place, and his second match dropped reddening upon the carpet, leaving him with a momentary vision of a table set for supper, and of glasses overturned upon it. He did not know to what mad instinct it was due, but as his fingers fumbled for another light, he had the thought that the body of the dead man might be at his very feet. And, at that, his hand was clumsy as the hand of one bitten by the cold; nor could the woman's distress quicken him or make him forget the horrid thought.

"Oh!" she repeated, "what is it? What do you see? Why do you light the gas?"

He suppressed a word of impatience, and at the third attempt obtained a flaming match. The chandelier now showed itself hanging low over the table, and he picked his way to it, thinking that every step might bring him to the body. Not until five burners were lighted, and a brilliant aureola was cut from the shadows, did he breathe a full breath in that place of mystery.

The room was a large one, furnished in the modern style. The pictures, as well as he could see them beyond the aureola, were of the Spanish school. There was a heavy mirror in a black oak frame above the fireplace; a second mirror hung above the buffet. Two chairs, he observed, had been drawn to the table, but one of them was overturned. A stain of red wine had

run over the white cloth, and dropped upon the chair beneath. A candle in a silver stick was broken in half, as though by a blow. Trivial as these omens were, they confirmed the woman's story strikingly. It was plain that there had been a brawl in the room, but what of the brawlers? Certainly, in that space which the circle of light covered, there was no sign of life or of the end of life. But beyond, in the shadows? He passed swiftly round the room, warmed to courage by the friendly gas. The matches no longer fell from clumsy fingers. There was no nook nor cranny into which he did not peer.

"Madame," he said at last, and it was a word of vast relief, "you may come in; there is no one here."

She entered with noiseless steps, and the light falling upon the superb jewels in her hair and about her neck gave a changing radiance of fire to them, so that her lightest movement was a glitter anew of sparkling gems. When she stood at his side and searched the room with her dark eyes, now aflame with curiosity, she seemed to him to be some queen of the East come masquerading to this suburb of London; yet from what city or upon what errand he could not so much as surmise. Nevertheless, he was sure of two things at the start of it—she was an aristocrat, and her jewels were the finest he had ever seen on woman.

"There is no one here," he repeated, resisting the temptation to stare at her; "I have looked everywhere, and am sure of it."

She drew a deep breath, and appeared to be thinking. Presently she turned to the buffet, and her quick eyes detected that which he had not seen there.

It was a handkerchief stained with blood. She held

it for a moment in her shapely hand, which quivered as a leaf that is to fall.

"My God!" she exclaimed, while all the colour rushed from her face, "what has happened? where are they? Why do I suffer like this?"

He thought that she would have swooned, and he put his arm about her, but she drew back from him and turned again toward the hall.

"Captain Falconer," she continued, in a quick and nervous tone which betrayed an agony of doubt, "will you search the other rooms with me? I do not know what it is—I cannot tell you—but this house has a great secret to give up to us, and I am alone. Oh, I have no right to ask you, no right to claim your kindness!"

She stood expectant, an exquisite figure in the circle of the light. Mystified as he was, afraid of the dreadful secret of that house, he yet could say to himself that here was a woman whom he would follow to the world's end.

"Madame," he said, "there is no question of right—I shall not soon forget the privilege."

"Nor I the service," she answered, but with such meaning in her tone that he turned quickly to look at her, and in that instant their eyes met. Ever afterwards he knew that Isabella de Gavarnie was his friend.

"Shall we begin on this floor?" he asked, as they stood once more in the darkness of the hall.

"If you please," she said quietly, and with that he struck another match and threw open the door of a room upon his right hand—a library, as he could see, but empty as the other room. The drawn blinds showed a glimmer of the morning light without; paper and pens littered upon a bureau spoke of the

occupations of the dead day ; a book lay upon a little table, and an empty coffee cup stood beside it. But this was a room of repose. A child could have told that there had been no brawl there.

"We waste our time here," he said, shutting the door of the library behind him. "Have you any reason to believe that your friends are still in the house?"

She held the blood-stained handkerchief which she had carried from the dining-room with her.

"I know that they are here—one of them," she exclaimed impatiently ; "yet if you wish to go——"

"I wish to go where you tell me," he answered.

"Then we will look in the drawing-room."

It was dark upon the staircase, but a great stained-glass window shimmered at the first touch of day, and the gas jet, which he turned up as he ascended, shone white and feeble before the light of dawn. The woman had not waited while he fumbled with the gas, and stood already upon the second landing, when he was ready to follow her. He hastened up the remaining stairs that she might not go alone ; but three steps still lay between them when she uttered a cry of distress, and he saw her drop upon one knee, and cover her eyes, as though to shut from them the secret which was a secret no more. And then he knew that the whole of her story was true ; for a man lay full length upon the floor, and those who saw him did not doubt that he was dead.

He was a young man, short in stature, and wearing the pointed beard beloved of the old Spanish painters. It was to be noticed that he wore a great white bow in the place of the narrow English neckties ; but his dress clothes seemed to be very new, and his

embroidered shirt front was scarcely ruffled. That he had been struck down in that place was Falconer's first thought, so that he feared to move him lest some gaping wound should show itself to the woman. But when he bent down and felt the young man's wrist, warm and pulsing with an even beat of the heart, he knew that he was mistaken. He lived; what was more, and this was the surpassing mystery, he breathed like a hale man.

"I am ashamed to ask you," said the woman, ignoring his astonishment, "but will you carry him to my boudoir? I thank Heaven that it is no worse; he is only sleeping."

It was not a moment for argument, but as Falconer lifted the unknown in his arms, two unanswerable questions flashed upon his mind—the first, how came it that this man lay in sleep in such a place; the second, what instinct guided the woman so that she knew that he was sleeping. Just as he had feared the secret of the house when it was not discovered, so did this discovery of it seem to him the greatest wonder he had heard or read of. He began to have a dread of the place which nothing could shake off. Who were these people? he asked himself. Whence came their riches; what was the meaning of the work of that night; where was that other of whom she had made mention? The very situation in which he found himself was one of awe;—the unbroken silence was as a harbinger of death. He could feel the sweat rolling down his face when he carried the sleeping man to the boudoir she had named and then laid him upon a sofa. But the mistress of the house was herself again. Fear had fallen from her like a cloak. Her new manner was imperious, almost commanding.

"I thank you from my heart," she said. "My brother only sleeps, as you see. He is subject to these attacks. They leave him weak and ill, but we can do nothing for him while they last. I shall be here until he wakes."

She stood at the door hesitating as though she had the wish that he should leave her. But his astonishment at her desire and at the spectacle of the man, lying as in a trance upon her sofa, kept him rooted to the spot. He was about to question her, when he heard a door shut very softly in the hall below, and so unexpected was the sound that he drew back as though a hand had touched him.

"Madame," he whispered, "there are others in the house."

"Oh, go—go!" she cried with an agitation she could not control. "Go, I beseech you, and leave me alone."

He bowed to her and left the room. When he turned the corner of the first landing, he could see her majestic figure outstanding in the morning light. He thought that he looked upon it for the last time.

There was sunshine in the hall; but he passed through it swiftly, fearing, with a child's fear, that some unseen hand would be outstretched to touch him as he walked. Not until the street door had closed behind him, and the sweet air of a June morning breathed upon his face, did dread of that house of mystery leave him. In the street he stood to gaze at its lightless windows, and to ask himself if, indeed, he had witnessed the things of that night, or had dreamed them upon his way. Outwardly it was as other houses—black and bare, with drawn blinds and gloomy portals—but within, what story could it tell?

He asked himself the question a hundred times as he turned towards his home.

At the corner of the interminable street he drank a cup of coffee from a stall. The man who served him remarked that his hand trembled. He did not answer him; but the wind of the morning told him that sweat was still running down his face.

CHAPTER II

THE GARRET

ON the seventh day after his meeting with the woman in the interminable street of Bayswater, Noel Falconer sat in his garret in the Marylebone Road and heard from his man Benjamin the news he had been awaiting so expectantly.

"Well?" he said, with as much assumed indifference as his curiosity could command, "you have been there, Benjamin."

Benjamin sidled up like a crab, for thus was his habit acquired in many years of faithful service at a mess table. There was no door in London, open but the half of a foot though it might have been, through which the old man could not slip when the need was.

"Yes, sir," he said, coming quite close to his master's chair, "I have been."

"And have learnt something new?"

Benjamin fingered the brim of his hat nervously. He was always a little frightened of the great hussar. Yet no man ever had a better friend.

"If you please," he said, answering the question with hesitation, "the housemaid at number ninety-two——"

"Benjamin," exclaimed Falconer severely, "let me hope that I have brought you up in the way you should go. At your age one does not speak of the housemaid at number ninety-two."

Benjamin giggled just for all the world like an old woman.

"Oh, sir—oh, indeed—well, to be sure—that you should think it."

"Go on with your story, Benjamin, and then I will tell you what I think."

He became serious directly, screwing his neck out of his collar, and sighing with that sigh which had become a part of his master's monotonous life.

"They told me at ninety-two that her name's Gavarnie, and she's a foreigner," he said quickly. "Very quiet and respectable party, and keeps company, sir. A widder lady may be—may not be. Backyard's full of champagne cases, and there isn't no washing hung out. She's not much there, but she lives alone and plays the piano. When any one stays in the house, it's a Spanish gentleman—a Count they think he is, but they don't know for certain. All the bills are paid every week, sir. Two pound fourteen for fruit last week, which is considerable, you'll admit. Three servants are kept, and two are women. There is nothing else, sir."

"Benjamin," said Falconer, "you ought to be at Scotland Yard."

He laughed again, still nervously.

"The kitchen's my newspaper," he explained, "and I don't want no better. You are dining out, sir?"

"Of course—but I shall breakfast here to-morrow."

The old man looked at his master in his quick, nervous way. He would have given a sovereign to have known why he had been sent to that gloomy street of Bayswater. But that was a curiosity Falconer did not wish to gratify.

"That's all, Benjamin," he exclaimed.

Benjamin shuffled from the room sighing. The burden of his master's poverty was heavy, but he shared it uncomplainingly.

"Where you go, I go," he had said when misfortune overtook them; "to the world's end, if it is to be, sir."

He meant his words, though, for the matter of that, Falconer might as well at such a time have talked of carrying him to the moon as to the world's end. When a solemn person at the Bankruptcy Court pronounces a man's "public examination" finished, and gives him certain good warning against rash and hazardous expenditure, he does not usually add to that advice a sum sufficient to ensure the payment of the bankrupt's bill for butcher's meat. When the great hussar was declared a bankrupt, and all that he had went to the Jews, and they took the very rings from his fingers, and sent him out to that exile of a two-pair back in the Marylebone Road, Benjamin alone remained to him. He could not raise money on the old servant, and so he stayed. Possibly, if it had been otherwise, he would have gone. They used to say in the "Tenth" that Falconer would play for his own right hand. And they knew the truth there.

Benjamin left the room, and Falconer walked to his window, thinking again of that strange night, now a week gone, when the monotony of his life had been broken for an instant by the apparition of the woman and the strange things he had seen in her house.

Not for an hour did the strange mystery of that day cease to shape stories for him, or to set him rack-ing his brains for anything that would throw light upon the house or upon its people. "A foreigner," said the gossips of the street. "A rich woman living alone." She paid her bills—oh, wonderful testimony

to the perfect neighbour! She went out much. There were empty champagne bottles in her garden! He laughed to himself, remembering the news old Benjamin had gathered. The sweet face of the woman had looked on him often since that night; he had stood with her again in the house of his sleep.

What freak of destiny, he asked, permitted him to pass by when those who were her guests had driven her to the streets? Would the same destiny lead him to her house again? Was the instinct which kept dinning it in his ears that this woman had become his friend a true premonition or the mere fancy of the dreamer? These thoughts and questions were his companions day and night.

The tidings which old Benjamin carried neither added to the number of them nor gave him answer. He was like a child which had looked upon some stage picture for an instant, and then had been hurried from the theatre. The play pursued him relentlessly, even to his bed.

There is not a great deal of that which the French papers call "le highlife" to be seen from the upper windows of a house in the Marylebone Road, unless the "high life" in question be a matter of altitude. For a little while on that seventh day, Falconer stood watching the endless procession of railway vans and lumbering waggons. Then, weary of the prospect, and remembering that for Benjamin's sake he must sooner or later go out and pretend to dine, he put on his hat and descended the well-worn stairs.

But he had not taken twenty steps westward before he saw the woman herself, the lady of the house of mysteries, driving slowly towards him, and he knew, as though she herself had said it, that her business was with him.

CHAPTER III

ISABELLA DE GAVARNIE

THE carriage was a victoria, superbly horsed; my lady herself was dressed as only a Parisian at Longchamps, or a Viennese in the Prater knows how to dress. Falconer thanked God in that moment for the good frock coat and the fresh silk hat which Carey Street had left to him. The garret which he had just quitted was remembered for an instant as the shabbiest in all London.

It was all the work of a moment, his own surprise and unconcealed pleasure, her cry of recognition, the swift reining in of the horses, the swerve of the carriage against the kerbstone. Ten seconds did not pass before he was holding her hand and telling himself how different she was from the woman who had crouched and shuddered on that unforgettable night. For the sunshine of the lingering day fell upon a face of surpassing sweetness, and the eyes, in which he had seen tears, were now aglow with the radiance of a woman's laughter.

"Captain Falconer," she said, speaking in quaint and pretty English, with the faintest possible accent to give it charm, "how lucky I am! I was coming to see you."

He thought of his garret, and flushed as a school-girl at her first compliment.

"Madame——" he exclaimed, and then stuck for the word.

"Gavarnie," she said, as though answering a question he had not spoken. "Will you let me come into your house and speak to you for a little while?"

Her hand had rested in his while she put the question; but now she drew it back and began to unwrap the white rug from her knees. He had no memory afterwards of what he said to her, but in his heart he exclaimed upon the Marylebone Road and its people; and more particularly upon the two-pair back, to which destiny had condemned him. When next he had command of his tongue, she was sitting in his one armchair, and declaring that, of all perfumes, she adored most the smell of tobacco. As for old Benjamin, Falconer heard him in his bedroom laughing like a child. And when Benjamin laughed, the world looked black indeed.

"Madame Gavarnie!" he exclaimed at last, accepting the worst, yet encouraged not a little by her manner, which was that of one who had a woman's heart and sympathy, "Madame Gavarnie, I will not apologise for my rooms, but I could wish that they were better for your sake. At least let me offer you some tea."

She put her hand upon his with a movement so gentle that all his shame passed in a moment.

"Are we not friends?" she said. "Am I not in a friend's house? Why speak of these things? I know your story, Captain Falconer—at least some of it. I have come here to know the rest. Oh yes, I will take a cup of tea, and you shall talk to me while I drink it."

He called loudly for Benjamin to bring tea—"and

for God's sake, in an uncracked cup," he added, *sotto voce*. When she was sipping it, her veil turned up about her French hat, and the bright glow upon her handsome face, he wondered that he could have lived in London so long and never have heard her name.

"You have been expecting me to call upon you?" she exclaimed presently, regarding him curiously with her great black eyes.

"I never thought of it in that way; but I have thought of you a thousand times since I saw you in the street."

"I was foolish," she exclaimed quickly. "There was no need to be so silly. My brother is well again now, and has forgotten the quarrel with his friend. We Spaniards, you know, are quick in temper. But we do not remember as you English. You will keep my secret, Captain Falconer?"

He said that he would. He thought that she could tell a lie with any woman in Europe. But she continued:

"Are you not the second son of Sir Francis Falconer, who was some time at the Embassy in Madrid? I seemed to know the name directly you uttered it. And the face—you have your father's face. I was very young then, but I have never forgotten one who showed so many kindnesses to me."

She looked round as though she could not reconcile such a place in her memories of the man.

"I am glad that you remember my father," Falconer said as he watched her; "you know, possibly, that he died four years ago at Belgrade. The fortune which he left me has gone to the Jews. My other distinctions are notorious. I resigned my commission in the 10th Hussars last March, and was declared a bank-

rupt three months ago. Believe me, Madame Gavarnie, I should make the fortune of a curate who wanted an example of the vices."

She smiled at the thought, but was serious again when she answered him.

"And your own fortune—do you not think of that?"

He rose from his chair, and paced the room wearily.

"Fools are those who do not succeed," he said gloomily; "thirty-seven millions there were in Carlyle's time: there are more to-day, and I am one of them. Tell me, what in Heaven's name have I to do with fortune, madame? Have I brains? Assuredly not, or the Jews would have left me my money. Have I influence? Yes, the influence of those who are scheming to get me out of the country because of the disgrace. Have I friends?"

She cut him short with a word.

"Yes," she said, "since you are the friend of Isabella de Gavarnie. I am right to say that, Captain Falconer?"

They were face to face now, for she had risen from her seat and stood with her hand laid very prettily upon his arm again. He read in her eyes something more than sympathy: the touch of her soft fingers made his heart leap.

"Oh, madame," he exclaimed, "what is the friendship of a ruined man worth to you?"

"If it should be worth all?" she answered quickly, betraying an excitement she had hitherto concealed; "if it should mean happiness, love—the things which make a woman's life? if it should mean that to me—your friendship, would you give it then, Captain Falconer?"

He bent down and kissed her hand. "A superb actress," he said to himself, "or one who lives in the shadow of a mystery." But to her he said:

"A thousand times—I would ask no greater happiness."

It was plain to him that she was greatly agitated—a fact which seemed to link the events of that strange night, when he had searched her house and discovered the sleeping man there, with her visit to his garret in the Marylebone Road. He was quite sure that she had told him nothing of the true history of that business; and when she sat again in his armchair, and made a sign to him to take a seat at her side, he thought that she was about to speak of it. But for a while she said nothing, though he could see she searched for words and covered the difficulty with an exquisite play of her magnificent fan.

"Captain Falconer," she said of a sudden, laying her fan upon her knee, "did not they say that you were the finest swordsman in your regiment?"

"They said a good many absurd things, Madame Gavarnie."

She ignored the evasion.

"And the best horseman?" she continued.

"Oh, my dear lady, will you not spare me?"

"You like the civilian's life?"

"Like it! Heaven forbid!"

"You would not refuse the offer of a commission abroad, if it were made to you?"

"A commission abroad—in a European regiment?"

She laughed at his unconcealed astonishment.

"In a regiment of which all Europe will hear before the year is out."

"For a possible service against my own country, madame?"

"For a possible service against the world, Captain."

Isabella de Gavarnie had the Southern love for the dramatic in thought, in word, in act. No queen of tragedy could have spoken the words as she spoke them. Even his stupefying surprise at her words could not hide from his eyes the superb beauty of the woman or the sweetness of her girlish face; yet what she meant, or of what service she wished to speak, he knew no more than old Benjamin in his kitchen.

"Madame Gavarnie," he said, "you jest with me."

"With such a jest, Captain, that will give you at a word all you love best in life—will put a sword in your hands again—will make you the master of men and of fortune—will send you back here to claim the name and the lands you have lost: that is how I jest, my friend."

Her manner was superb, the manner of a grand dame rewarding one who had served her and won favour. But to the man her words were an enigma surpassing any he had known.

"My dear lady," he answered quickly, "we live in the nineteenth century, when romance has ceased to be. If you had come to me a hundred years ago—and, pardon me, a hundred years could not age Madame Gavarnie—I should have been all ears for your proposal. But to-day, now, when the mercenary is a brigand of the Balkans, and swordsmanship is a show for a *salle d'armes*, do you think it wonderful that I cannot answer you? You speak of a service against the world—of a service in which I am to win fortune—

of a regiment of which all Europe will hear before the year is out. My response is a question: what are the conditions of such a service?"

"The conditions are two, Captain: the first that you leave England to-morrow morning for Zaragoza; the second that you go to Spain as the friend of Isabella de Gavarnie. Do not think that I come here unselfishly, a philanthropist who would confer some obligation upon you. I come rather to claim a service of you. If you listen to my promises—if, as I know you will, you go to Spain to-morrow—I ask that it shall be as the guardian of my secrets and of my interests. I am about to bring you face to face with a man born to be a king of men, of a man—God knows!—to whom my life, my future will be entrusted presently for my eternal happiness or my eternal misfortune. I send you to one who is a living mystery, incomprehensible as the story of life itself—to a man able to scorn time and space and country, who is to-day in London, to-morrow in Petersburg—a man from whom no secrets are hidde, powerful to win the love of men, relentless in enmity, unswerving in friendship. I send you to him to be his servant, but more than that, to be my friend. Captain Falconer, you will leave England to-morrow—is it not written down in the book of your destiny which sent you to my house a week ago?—you will leave England, and before you return he whom you go to serve will have won his kingdom—and—all that his kingdom means to him."

She clutched her fan convulsively. He could see that her heart was pulsing quickly; in her eyes he beheld a light of awe, of mystery, as of some thought half pleasing, half to be dreaded. Nor could he mistake her words. She would send him to Spain to tell her

of the man who was to become her husband. Never, surely, was there a more remarkable mission.

The whole course of his changing life had vouchsafed nothing so amazing. Curiosity, awe, wonder, possessed him in turn. A thousand questions were suggested and left unasked. "She sends me to her lover," he said to himself again and again. No longer had he any doubt what answer he should give her. He felt that he must see with his own eyes the man who had won the love of Isabella de Gavarnie.

"You speak of strange things, Madame Gavarnie," he said after they had sat for some minutes in silence—"of a service which I cannot so much as imagine—of a man whom I am anxious already to know. Yet, if it be to your interest, I will go to the end of the earth. There is nothing, surely, to keep me in England. If this employment you name be an honourable employment, such as a soldier may follow, your friend shall find a willing comrade. Tell me only where shall I look for him? what shall I say to him? how shall I make myself known?"

She rose and clapped her hands; no childish delight could have been expressed more prettily.

"I knew you would go; I knew you would be my friend," she exclaimed, looking up to him with eyes which betrayed a woman's gratitude; "and you shall never regret, never to your life's end, that you have been willing to obey me. To-morrow you leave England, Captain. In three days you will be in the mountains where my childhood was spent. I beg you forget the name of Isabella de Gavarnie before you cross the Spanish frontier. Keep the secret between us as you value your safety. Think of nothing but the new career which fortune has opened to you. For

myself, when I have need of you, my messenger will come. And you will not fail me—I know it, oh, I have known it since first you spoke to me in the silence of my house.”

She waited for his answer with an excitement which quickened her heart and flushed her face. She had spoken of such strange things, that curiosity alone would have sent him upon her errand. And it seemed ridiculous, indeed, that he must step in between the drama of the moment and the drama to come with a word upon a small matter which even my lady’s grand manner would not permit him to forget.

“Well,” she cried, observing his hesitation, and taking alarm at it, “you do not answer me?”

“Madame,” he replied with a laugh to cover the shame he felt, “point out to me the railway company that will carry a bankrupt to Spain for the honour of his company, and my answer is made.”

She did not, upon the instant, comprehend his meaning; but as soon as it was made clear to her, he read in her eyes a great self-reproach that she should compel him thus to speak. Swiftly, lest he should refuse her, with hands that trembled upon the silken strings, she snatched at her satchel and took from it a letter sealed with a black seal and addressed already to him.

“Oh,” she exclaimed impatiently, “that I should forget it! Of course your friends have thought of that. This letter will tell you of things you need to know. Believe me, Captain Falconer, the debt is mine a thousand times. And you will keep the secret of Isabella de Gavarnie—she may call you her friend?”

She laid the letter upon the table, and turning, held out both her hands to him. For a moment his own closed upon them, and he stood, seeking to read in that

exchange the tremendous secret of her coming. No word was spoken, no other greeting passed. But that instant of time chained him to her in a bond which nothing but her death or his might sever.

* * * * *

Next morning at ten o'clock Captain Noel Falconer and old Benjamin, his servant, left Victoria for Madrid. They were at the Casa de Arino, the best hotel in the Spanish town of Zaragoza, at sunrise on the second day after.

CHAPTER IV

THE WHITE HUSSARS OF THE MOUNTAINS

FALCONER often used to say that if he had told old Benjamin to be ready to cut off his master's head (by request) on the following morning at eight o'clock, the answer would have been, "Very good, sir." Twice in his life, perhaps, had the old man expressed by a look, and a sigh heavy beyond the ordinary, his surprise at that which he had done, or was about to do.

"Benjamin, we go to Spain to-morrow."

"Very good, sir."

"You will take first-class tickets and berths in the *wagons-lits*."

"Very good, sir."

"To any one who asks, you will say that we shall be back in a month's time; but for your own information, Benjamin, I would have you to know that we may never come back at all."

"Very—good—sir."

But, oh, what a sigh upon that!

From Paris to Madrid this man of men addressed no word to the master he served. Here and there, indeed, he commented in good Middlesex upon the various thieves who sought to honour the *caballero Ingles*. But it was not until they arrived at the picturesque, if dirty, town of Zaragoza that surprise at it all became too much for him, and he blurted out a question he had long wished to ask.

"Any orders for to-morrow, sir?"

"Sleep, Benjamin, that is the order. Do you not see it is four o'clock of the morning?"

"I see many things I don't understand, sir; beside the clock."

Falconer looked at him. His cunning old eyes were eloquent beyond words.

"Your master is in the same position, Benjamin," said he at last. "He does not know why he is in this hotel at all; he does not understand how money came into his pockets; he does not know, any more than the dead, where his next bed will be laid. You are astonished—well, so is he. Get him a whisky and soda, Benjamin, or any substitute for it which this infernal city can provide. You like Spain, you like the señoritas; they are better than the housemaid at ninety-two, Benjamin?"

The old fellow chuckled nervously, and then became very serious.

"You will pardon me, sir, that I should name it: well, to be sure, you do not think there is any risk, sir?"

"Benjamin," said his master decisively, "as for the risk, I am like the converted Jew—I don't care a damn either way. Where we are going to, or what is to become of us, Heaven only knows. But if our throats must be cut next Saturday, I would not for that go back to the gentlemen of Carey Street, or the Hades they found for me in the Marylebone Road."

The old man straightened himself up and looked the speaker full in the face.

"We shall never go back there, sir—God grant it!"

He shuffled off to bed and Falconer to his room. It was the hour of dawn, and the Spanish town shim-

mered in the first glow of a terrible sunshine. Spires stood up like needles above the sluggish and muddy Ebro. The narrow streets of the city were alive, and blocked already with the primitive carts of the countrymen awaiting market. Church bells called the peasants to Mass. A haze of white and spreading mists steamed up from the fertile plains beyond the city's bounds, promising a day of surpassing heat to come. Even in the airy room at the Casa de Arino, the morning air was heavy as a breath from a city's lung. The weary Englishman could not sleep, was too tired to walk, too excited to think of aught but the strange fortune which had carried him—a bankrupt soldier—from his own country to a service the nature of which he could not even guess at, to a city which hitherto had been no more than a name to him.

Often since he set out from England had he stood a moment to ask himself upon what enterprise he was embarking, or what end he pursued? He would say at such times that Isabella de Gavarnie was a creature of his imagination; would account her desire that he should go to Spain, and wait there until her messenger sought him out, a desire of his fancy. But in Zaragoza, at the window of the hotel which looked out upon the dirty city of Northern Spain, he could hide the reality from himself no longer. No miracle, he said, would carry a bankrupt in a sleeping car from Paris to Zaragoza; no miracle would put five hundred pounds in the pockets of him who yesterday had not five hundred pence. These things were facts; the great mystery alone remained—the mystery of the woman who had sent him upon the errand; the mystery of the man he had set out to find.

Who was she, this stately creature, upon whose house he had stumbled so strangely in that silent street of Bayswater? What service of the sword could there be in Spain for a ruined officer of English hussars? These things she had neglected to speak of. He had her letter, it is true—the letter, sealed with the black seal, and laid upon his table so delicately in that garret in London. But it gave him no clue to her purpose. Many times he read the few lines she had written upon that little slip of paper. They seemed to be lines in keeping with her own character.

“At the Casa de Arino, in the town of Zaragoza, he to whom you are sent will seek for you. Let no mention of my name pass your lips. Forget that you have heard it as you value your life, yet in your heart may there be friendship for

“ISABELLA DE GAVARNIE.”

So ran the letter which she had left upon his table. It was twice folded and wrapped in English bank-notes to the value of £500. Beyond these, a slip cut from a French newspaper made up the contents of her envelope. He read the cutting in London, but could make nothing of it. He read it again in Paris, and said that it magnified the mystery. He read it for the third time at the window of the Casa de Arino, and suddenly, out of the void of mystery, a little light of understanding seemed to shine upon him.

The cutting was from the Paris *Figaro*. Some one had put a date upon the margin of it—the third day of June, in the week that he had met Madame Gavarnie. There were scarcely fifteen lines in all—a mere *jeu d'esprit* written at hazard by a jester of the day. Yet that slip of paper could recall to him in after years the

momentous events he lived through as no other record in all the history of his life.

CHEZ TARTARIN

Our friends, the tourists, who are going to Spain this autumn, will hear, if not with interest, at least with amusement, that the army of the mountains is again troubling the heads of the good people of Arragon. Ever since Philip, Count of Gavarnie, was banished from the Pyrenees in the year 1876, these simple mountaineers have clung to their childish belief that the White Hussars their master used to command still ride the hills of Arragon, and make their voices heard in the forests about his home. *Vive la vérité!* our latest news of the regiment is from *Le Soir*, the evening paper of Toulouse, which is so kind as to entertain us with a story of a traveller who crossed the Pyrenees recently from Törla to Gèdre, and not only heard the superstition of the White Hussars, but beheld them riding on the hills, a magnificently mounted troop, as magnificently equipped and drilled. We take our hat off to this traveller, and to our friends, the White Hussars of Gavarnie.

Many times he read the paragraph before he put it into his pocket-book again. Though he had travelled all night in a filthy cattle-truck, sleep was not to be won, nor even a pretence of rest to be enjoyed. The words of the *Figaro's* jester rang still in his ears. He had not been ten years in a cavalry regiment at home and remained ignorant of the hussars who served under Philip of Gavarnie, and bore the burden of the Carlist war as no other regiment in all Spain. And she who had sent him upon this errand—was not her name Gavarnie also? He was amazed at the folly which had not connected these things before.

Philip of Gavarnie, the noblest of all the crowd of true men and false who contested the Throne of Spain with Alfonso the Twelfth—was he, then, the father of the woman who thus had crossed his path? But

Philip's death was already written in history; and who could win the confidence of the men of Arragon as he had won it? Moreover, Isabella had spoken of a service not against a dynasty, but against the world.

Rack his brains as he might, he could not gather up the threads of the story. He thought of all possible causes which might lead a man to enlist a troop of horsemen in those rugged wilds of the Pyrenees, yet none could explain Madame Gavarnie's promises, her fears, her warnings. For how should service in a regiment of hussars make the fortune of him who served? and how should a regiment hide itself from the world, if its purpose were against the world, there in the highlands of modern Spain? Curiosity, indeed, had him as in a vice. Not until the bells of the cathedral clock were striking midday did he turn from his weary pursuit of these shadows and fall into an unrefreshing sleep. "The man will send for me," he said before he slept; "to-day, to-morrow, I shall know all—and then?"

He passed to sleep with the question upon his lips; he awoke to ask it again unto twenty times. Zaragoza was quickening to the life of night then. He heard music from her gardens, beheld pretty women upon her *cinque-cento* balconies, jostled the cloaked cavaliers of romance in her streets. With a word to old Benjamin to have dinner ready against his return, he quitted the Casa de Arino and turned his steps towards the great stone bridge which for centuries has spanned the river Ebro. There he was standing in the moonbeams, watching the shimmer of the silver light upon the lapping waters, when some one touched his arm; and, turning swiftly, he beheld a gipsy girl, who beckoned him to follow her.

CHAPTER V

GIRALDA, THE GIPSY

THE girl stood in the shadow of the parapet—a timid, graceful figure, half hidden by a black mantilla, which fell from her well-poised head almost to her feet. Falconer had heard often of the Gitanos of Zaragoza, and thought at the first that she was of their number—a gipsy from the gardens beyond the wall come to beg *cuartos* of the Englishman. But that idea passed swiftly. Even as he hesitated whether to obey impulse again—as he had obeyed it so often since he met Isabella de Gavarnie—or to dismiss the gipsy with a curt word, she advanced from the shadows, and all doubt was at an end. For she carried a passport which no man—and a soldier less than other men—knows how to refuse: a face so beautiful and winning that he swore it was not surpassed in all the paintings of the masters. Moreover, it was plain that she was a mere child.

He called her a child, and, in truth, her youth was written in every girlish gesture. Never might he forget the picture she made as she stood there in the moonlight with the clear beams falling softly upon her pretty head, and a glitter of trinkets about her arms and throat. No longer was it possible to think of her as the dancing girl from the taverns beyond the city walls. She lacked all the boldness and the impudence

which would have betrayed such a calling. He could read in her attitude fear both for herself and for him—for her own sake in so far as their meeting might compromise her; for his in that he might refuse her a hearing. But his astonishment at her beauty and at the comparative richness of her dress kept him silent and doubting. Was it possible that this little gipsy girl came to him from Isabella the magnificent? A voice answered, "Yes"; the same voice said, "Listen and follow her."

"Señor," she said at last, speaking in French, richly coloured with the accent of those who live upon the frontier towns, "you seek for some one in Zaragoza?"

Falconer raised his hat, advancing in his turn from the shadows.

"Since I have found you, señorita, the search is at an end."

She drew back, as though resenting the compliment. It was not to be hidden from him that she feared watchers in the dark places beyond the bridge.

"At the gate of the cathedral, señor," she exclaimed shyly; and with that was gone like a frightened thing, away towards the great church upon the left bank of the river.

He cast a quick look round, to make sure that no one followed him, and then sought the church she had named. There are two cathedrals in Zaragoza, but he knew that she spoke of the Seu, whereby stands the famous gate, La Pavosteria. No better place in all the city could have been chosen at such an hour of night by one who sought to escape the prying eyes of gossips or of spies. Already the taverns and the *fondas* were merry with the junketings of the human night-birds. Guitars twanged from many a balcony; there was

music in many a garden ; but the great church and its close were as silent as the tombs they shadowed.

The gipsy girl was waiting for him when he came up to the gate. He could see her picturesque figure motionless as one of the pillars by which she stood. When he spoke to her, she drew aside her mantilla and showed him eyes no longer timid or afraid. He perceived, to his surprise, that her hair was light in colour, almost as the hair of an English blonde ; while the exquisite delicacy of her skin, and the smallness of her hands and feet, betrayed an origin which had no kinship with the rôle she assumed so easily.

"Señor," she said, almost with a childish delight in her triumph, "I knew that you would come here !"

"Señorita, there was no choice, since you commanded."

"*Madre de Dios*—who is Giralda, the gipsy, to command ?"

"She is the queen of all gipsies."

The flattery pleased her. She turned laughing eyes toward him, and thrust out a little foot from her artificially ragged petticoat. A ray of the moonlight falling upon the silver buckle of her shoe made it shine as a knot of diamonds. He said that she was sixteen, and he doubted no longer that she had assumed a disguise.

"Señorita," he continued, observing her hesitation, "you have a message for me ?"

She shrugged her shoulders, as one who would say, "That depends."

"Ay, *Dios*, I have many messages ; but is it not for you to speak, señor ?"

"Not at all. It is for your friends in London to have written to you."

He saw that he could not come at the thing by any play of words, and so blurted out his tale without more ado.

"Now see," continued he, "here is an Englishman sent to Zaragoza from London by a friend of his, who tells him that a message will be delivered in this city. Very well. That Englishman has not been a day in the place before you touch him upon the shoulder, and ask him if he does not seek some one. Should not that make us good friends, señorita?"

"You would wish to be the friend of Girálida?" she asked, still playing the coquette.

"A thousand times, when I learn that the wish is hers also."

There never were two eyes which could invite to flirtation as the eyes of Giralda, the gipsy girl.

"I am your friend for the sake of her who sent you," she answered simply. "I shall be your friend always, Captain Falconer."

"You know me, then?"

"*Madre de Dios*—if I know you. Are you not the soldier who has come here to serve the Prince? Are you not the friend of my friend? *Bueno*, we ride together presently, and then you shall say if I know you."

He seized her by the wrists—acting upon an impulse not to be avoided—and drew her close to him.

"Little friend," he said, "this has been a week of things I do not understand, but Giralda, at least, is no mystery until now. Tell me what you mean when you say that we ride together?"

"Señor," she said, becoming serious, and lifting her childish face so close to his that he could feel her warm

breath, "I cannot speak of these things here and now where twenty may watch us. But this is the message I am to deliver: that you meet me at the prison gate, when midnight is striking, and that thence we ride to the Prince. You will not fail me, señor?"

He answered her by a kiss upon her pretty lips. For a moment she lay snug in his strong arms, then slipped from them very cleverly, and was lost in the black shadows between the pillars of the great church.

But she left him with her command still ringing in his ears; and it seemed to him when she was gone that the mystery of his journey was the greater for her message.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE GATE OF ZARAGOZA

HE returned to the Casa de Arino with swift steps. Zaragoza interested him no more—Zaragoza, nor her people. Just as curiosity had been one of the motives which sent him to Spain on an errand as strange as any in history, so now did curiosity compel him to obey the unknown who masqueraded in the trinkets of a Gitano. He said to himself that he would ride with her to the devil, if need be. A memory of her laughing eyes and warm lips set him hungering for their next meeting, or a clue to her identity.

More than this, he began to know a certain joy of the whole adventure which he had not imagined possible when he left London. After all, a man does not live in a two-pair back in the Marylebone Road; he exists. And it is a platitude to say that poverty chooses her best weapons from the armoury of the rich. Until the Bankruptcy Court took charge of his affairs, the world had accounted Noel Falconer a lucky man. The months of suffering and neglect and shame which he had lived through made him grateful for those hours of respite in the land of sunshine and of pretty women. He would go through with it to the end, he said; and in his heart he echoed the wish that Giralda, the gipsy, would see him on his way.

Perchance this resolution owed something to the soldier's blood in his veins. The record must be turned back many a page to find a day when a Falconer was not known to the War Office. From their birth up, the children of the house were taught to believe that arms are the only profession of a gentleman. The names of their forefathers have glittered upon the monuments to the nation's gallant dead. And if one had said to Noel Falconer in his boyhood that the hour would come when he must lay down the sword which his country had put into his hand, and turn with shame from the old way of life, he would have called him a liar and struck him in the face. So little could he foresee that day, nor, for a truth, a later day, when he should wander in a Spanish town seeking out a gipsy girl, who was to lead him Heaven knew whither or upon what venture.

Old Benjamin was in the courtyard of the hotel when his master returned. He had already shed some tears over the dinner which was spoiled, and was prepared to shed more in the gladness of reassurance. But Falconer cut him short and left him with a measure of astonishment brimming up and overflowing.

"Benjamin, you have seen the riding coats worn by the swashbucklers in this place of perfumes?"

He smiled in a knowing way. If he had seen them!

"While I am dining you will go out and buy me one. Get, at the same time, one of those thunder and lightning sashes, and a *sombrero*, Benjamin, large enough to go on the head of a fool. That will just fit me and the business I am going upon. You understand?"

There was the suggestion of a twinkle in old Benjamin's eye. If his thoughts could have been read, it is possible a repartee about the housemaid at ninety-two would have been mixed up with them.

"I understand, sir," he answered, with wonderful civility.

"I am glad to see that the señoritas have not yet deprived you of your usual intelligence, Benjamin. You may now go out and buy the things I speak of. Add to them a cloak which will make me as much of a brigand as colour and circumstance 'will permit. And, by the way, put out my passport and load my pistols."

Benjamin stood stock still with the wine-bottle poised in his hand.

"The pistols, sir?"

"Certainly; should I ask you to load my sword? You will charge my pistols and put them out on my bed with my riding-breeches and my long boots. I am going for a little trip into the country, Benjamin—Saturday to Monday, on easy terms. And, since it is possible that I shall not return at all, I am going to give you a hundred pounds, with which, failing to trace my body for decent burial, you will make your way back to London. Once there you will go straight to the lady named Gavarnie and tell her what you have done. It is quite clear to you, Benjamin?"

Benjamin poured out the Manzanilla with a steady hand.

"Is it clear to you, sir?" he asked presently.

"I'll be hanged if it is, Benjamin!"

He put down the bottle and began to sniff at a dish which a dirty-fisted waiter had set upon the

buffet. His master knew well what he was saying to himself. He had served a mad hussar for ten years, and might continue in the employment yet a little time.

When dinner was done and he had smoked a *segaretto* by the splashing fountain in the courtyard, Falconer's mind was fully made up as to the journey—if it were to be a journey—which the gipsy had proposed to him. He determined, at a soldier's whim, to take fortune as she came to him. At the worst, it would be a flirtation with the prettiest creature he had yet seen in Spain; at the best, it would be knowledge of the man she called the Prince. And to this end he thought it well not to hire a horse until he had learnt at the prison gate of Zaragoza what her promise, that he should ride with her, really meant; if she had the intention to present herself at the rendezvous at all.

That the adventure might be coloured with danger to him personally was a premonition which never entered his head. He had good pistols for his holsters; his muscles were as hard as iron. He remembered that a society paper once called him a triumph of matter over mind. It would be a bad day, then, when he must shuffle off because a Spanish cut-throat lurked beyond the city wall. Besides, there was his disguise, which he flattered himself would make him as good a Spaniard as the best of them. Never did man set off to a masquerade with a lighter heart than the English hussar to his rendezvous with the gipsy of Zaragoza.

It was a quarter to twelve when he left the inn, and two minutes before the hour of midnight when he found the gipsy, accompanied by a man who led two horses, at the gate called La Ceneja.

"Señor," she said quickly, avoiding the formalities of greeting, "if you are ready, we will go now, and be in the mountains at dawn."

"Oh, it is to the mountains that we are to ride, then?"

"I guide you to Torla," she exclaimed earnestly; "after that the way is your own, and you will have no need of me. Be pleased to mount, señor, lest others see us."

He observed that she was dressed much as when he had seen her by the gate of the cathedral; but her skirt was shorter for riding and she carried an exquisite whip, in the handle of which jewels sparkled. The veil she wore was thicker, so that you could distinguish nothing of her face except the sparkling black eyes which she could use with the ripe art of the coquette. When she sprang upon her horse, it was with the agility of one schooled in all the activities of life. And this was even more astonishing, that the watch, whose prying questions Falconer had feared, gave her the civility due to a *grande dame*.

"God and the Virgin go with señorita," he cried, bowing low, "and you, señor, may you remain with the saints."

A pious wish; but it was Falconer's thought, when he mounted the little bay horse which the Spaniard held, that he would sooner be at the side of Giralda, the gipsy, there upon the road to the mountains, than in the company of all the saints that Rome has canonized.

CHAPTER VII

THE PHANTOM ARMY

IT had been in his mind when he rode out of Zaragoza that he would find an early opportunity by the way to question the gipsy and to learn from her more than he had yet learnt, either in London or in the Spanish city, of the woman who had sent him to Spain, and the man he was to meet there. But he had not ridden a league before it became clear to him that his guide had no intention of thus permitting herself to be questioned, or, indeed, of gratifying his curiosity in any way. Not once until they had clattered through the hamlet of Ayerbe and were well upon the road to France again did she draw rein or permit him to come up with her. She was breathless when at last she checked her willing horse and prepared to listen to his compliments.

"Well," said he, and such a picturesque thing she was that he could not take his eyes off her, "is this the way you ride for pleasure?"

She lifted the veil from her face and showed him that the compliment pleased her.

"It was necessary to pass Ayerbe before dawn, señor. Many ride that road to the city, and they are not all the Prince's friends. But we are among our own people now, and we shall get other horses at Jaca to carry us into the hills. *Bueno!* there is nothing in all the world like a good horse."

She patted the pretty creature she rode affectionately, and then laughed slyly, as though the part she played amused her. But he had made up his mind that she should speak more plainly than she had done hitherto, and of a sudden he seized her bridle-rein and brought the horses to a stand.

"Giralda," said he, "we are going to talk a little while, and you are going to tell me many things. I have ridden twelve miles with you already without asking any questions. Is it fair that I should go on in this way?"

She simulated great surprise.

"Ay, *Dios!* señor, is it my fault? Do I ask it?"

"Not at all, the question is mine. It is a very simple question, Giralda. Who is Madame Gavarnie, and who is the man to whom she is sending me?"

She betrayed no surprise at the question; her serious eyes told him that she was debating it. For a little while they rode on in the darkness, letting the horses amble as they would. Their way lay upward out of the plain to the picturesque glens of the mountains.

"Come," continued he, "do you deny me such a little favour?"

"I deny you nothing, señor. I am only the servant of the servants. If you would speak of Madame Gavarnie, command me, and I will tell you what you wish. She is my friend, and there is no one like her in Spain. She is your friend too, or you would not be riding with me to-night."

"I understand that; but there are other things I do not understand. Your friend has a home in Spain, you say?"

"She had a home; but the birds build their nests

in it now. It was before the war—I am too young to remember that.”

“And her relatives, do they not live in Arragon?”

She shook her head.

“They come and go like the snow,” she exclaimed earnestly: “to-day they are here, to-morrow we do not see them. But we wait always, for when they return our King will come also.”

He looked at her closely. In that instant he seemed to read the key to the mystery which had sent him from England.

“Oh,” said he, “so you are a little revolutionist, then. And the man to whom you are taking me—does he also wait for the coming of this King?”

“Señor, how shall the King wait for the King? Is he not our lord and master? Will he not save Spain and make her great? *Ojala!* you do not know or you would not ask me these things.”

He had never heard in all his life a story which astonished him more. Strange as they were, those few words lifted the veil from his eyes, and showed him the dark road of danger and conspiracy which, in his folly, a woman had found him so willing to follow. A man who would save Spain! A man spoken of by the peasants as their lord and master! A man seeking swords for his service! What child could not have told the rest? The way before him was no longer hidden in darkness. He saw that it lay straight—the road to the prison or the scaffold. And so suddenly did the truth come to him that he reined in his horse, and sat for a long while dazed and helpless, as one struck by an unseen enemy.

What course to take, now that he knew all, whether to go on and behold this man with his own eyes or to

return at once to England and face the woman, was the question which held him to the place. He could see the girl watching him with anxious eyes; he could detect her fear lest he should turn and leave her—there on the road to the mountains. But that was no hour wherein to be led by a woman's pretty face. He determined on the spot that he would not ride another league unless she could add some good word of explanation to the extraordinary story she had told him.

"Giralda," said he, unconsciously letting the horse go again, "do you know what is about to happen to this King of yours?"

She laughed scornfully.

"To the Prince, señor?—what is about to happen to him?"

"Call him what you like, King or Prince as you please—they are going to take him to Madrid presently and to cut off his head."

Her contempt for this answer was a pretty thing to see. She regarded him as a child who spoke of things yet to be learnt.

"Señor," she said, "there is no power in the world which could harm my master."

"He is immortal, then?"

"He is sent from God," she answered simply.

"That may be; but God is on the side of the largest battalions. Who can help this man when the Spanish troops seek him in the mountains?"

"Spain will help him, Excellency—Spain and his friends, who are to be found in all the cities of the world. Ay, *Dios!* he is above all men, greater than all. The people fall on their knees to worship him when he rides through the mountains. His armies come and go like the wind and the thunder. To-day

we see them, to-morrow there is silence in the mountains. His enemies die, and their houses crumble to the dust. His friends are richer than kings, and follow him like children. Mother of God! if I were a man, it would be happiness to obey such a master, and to die for him."

He had never thought that a simple girl of the people could betray such passion as this gipsy girl now showed. All the religious ecstasy of the ignorant mountaineer was to be read in her questions; and she had given her companion the word he asked. If a gibbet had stood up the road before him, he would have gone on to the end.

"Tell me," said he, "the Prince lives at Torla?"

"There is no house in the mountains which is not a home to him."

"But we shall hear of him at Torla?"

"Excellency, we shall hear of him to-night, now, for yonder he has lighted us a lamp."

They had ridden into a deep glen of the mountains; into a glen bordered by a thick cluster of trees, which arched their leaves above them and hid the star-lit sky from their eyes. Beyond the glen and through the vista of leaves, the ravines and gorges of the Pyrenees were to be seen; and over those again the peaks of the mighty mountains which stand sentinels of the frontier. To the hills, forest clad and golden in the moonlight, the gipsy pointed when she said that her master had set up a lamp. When Falconer looked at them her meaning was clear to him. For there, standing on the very edge of a grassy precipice, he beheld a majestic castle, and from every one of its lower windows tongues of flame were leaping.

Terrible in the silence of the night was this appal-

ling beacon. Even as the travellers sat spellbound, the rushing fire began to lick the outstanding turrets and to embrace walls which had defied the centuries. They could hear the shrieks of women and of men; could see the terrified inhabitants huddled together helpless and awe-struck on the terrace of the house. The crackle of the fire, heard above the hush of the forest, was as the roar of a mountain torrent. Soon all the sky was blood-red and quivering. Dogs howled dismally; alarm bells gave a tocsin. The horses of the two began to plunge and to rear, so that their riders drove them out of the glen with difficulty; and when they stood again in the open they were not three hundred paces from the fire, and could see the lights of Jaca twinkling on the road before them.

Everywhere now the country was awakening. From the town itself there came a great press of people, all running towards the burning château. Priests exhorted their flocks; guards upon horseback, rogues ripe for pillage, and women drawn by curiosity from their beds. Shouting, appealing, praying to God and the Virgin, the crowd drew nearer. Then, and it was a thing surpassing any wonder of that night of wonders, this great throng fell suddenly upon its knees, and a hush fell again upon the mountains.

What miracle had been wrought? What hand had stayed them? What vision had they seen? The questions scarce were uttered when the answer was given. High upon the hills above, riding out from the gates of the burning château, there passed a troop of horsemen, whose white pelisses were opening to the breeze, whose plumes waved like the wings of

birds, whose glittering swords shone in the moonlight as swords of gold. One hundred, two hundred, Falconer knew not how many—a superb company, their gaudy habiliments glowing in that strange light as with an ornament of jewels—they rode on headlong, with cries that resounded through the glens of the mountains, in a gallop that was terrifying, irresistible.

One long minute the travellers beheld them; they heard the shrill voices of the peasants, they observed the terror of the guards, the frenzy of the priests. Then the vision passed away. The hussars disappeared into the forests. Only the burning castle, with its heart of lurid flame and its crest of sullen smoke, stood up to tell them that these things had been in truth, and not in dreams.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GLEN BELOW TORLA

GIRALDA had not spoken to her companion from the moment when they first beheld the burning château until the last of the white horsemen had disappeared in the hills. The same spirit of awe which possessed him and was not to be resisted, the same delight in that wild scene of daring and of courage, had muted her lips and held her still. She was as a child in an ecstasy of pleasure. And her pleasure remained when the troop had vanished, and the frenzied peasants were coming to their senses again.

"Excellency," she cried, turning to him suddenly, "you would wish to go back to Zaragoza now?"

He did not answer her question, but put another.

"The Prince you speak of, is this his work?"

He pointed to the château and to the wind-blown fire which enveloped it. So fiercely did it burn that embers of wood and glowing ashes fell almost at their horses' feet.

"It is an answer to the enemies of Spain," she said. "There have been many beacons in the mountains since the winter; there will be many more when the winter comes again."

"Your friend is an assassin and a brigand, then?"

She pointed to the throng of peasants all huddled together and gibbering on the road before them.

"Excellency," she asked, "do men bow down and worship the assassin and the brigand?"

He had no word for her argument. The strange spectacle he witnessed, the terror of those come out of their beds to see the beacon on the hills, the glittering troop of horsemen, sent all his logic to the winds. Curiosity took possession of him anew. He must see the man who could work these miracles—must speak to him—know him.

"Giralda," he said, "we shall meet the Prince at dawn?"

"We have lingered an hour, and must rest at the inn beyond the city. After that it is three leagues, señor. I leave you at the torrent beyond Torla—my work is done; you will see me no more."

She could play the coquette as no woman he had ever met. At any other time a soldier's love of an adventure would have set him scheming to detain her in the hills; but the swift events of the night had put such thoughts from him, and he rode on silently and at the canter.

At the hamlet of Jaca, they found the horses she had promised. The sun was scarce above the horizon when he saw the mountains of Torla, and knew that the end of his journey was near.

They rode in the heart of the hills, through a mighty forest which had outworn kings and dynasties and the glory of Spain. A thousand changing lights flashed upon the higher peaks; the pinnacles of snow were so many glittering spires of crystal, and topaz, and amethyst. Ever and anon they passed some rushing torrent, whose note was a rolling harmony of icy waters tumbling and foaming in channels of stone. The grass which their horses trod gave ripe

greens to the eye; the rustling leaves above were as fans held by the hands of elves.

Weary as he was, Falconer had a joy of the new day which no sense of peril yet to be encountered, no memory of the night, could efface. The world awakening gave him a new regard for the little guide come to him so strangely in a strange land. He said that he would be content if she would lead him even to the world's end. For there was sunlight now upon her pretty face; the shadow of fatigue could not rob her of her girlish beauty; in all the mountains there was no fairer thing than Giralda. When at last he realized that they had come to the parting of the ways, that henceforth he must ride alone, it seemed to him that he was leaving the one being in all Spain who would remember so much as his name.

They were close upon the hamlet of Torla then. A glen struck up the hillside from the valley of forest to the remoter heights above—a glen dark, and solitary, and black beneath the shadow of great trees. Here his companion checked her horse and made it clear to him that their journey was done.

"Captain Falconer," she said, speaking, to his very great astonishment, in English almost as good as his own, "your way lies yonder up the glen. When you see the Prince, say nothing of those who brought you, and nothing will be asked. Your past is your best introduction. Do not forget that you have come to offer your sword to one whose name will soon be heard in all Europe. And when you remember that, forget Giralda, the gipsy."

He could not answer her for the surprise of it. She played the coquette no longer. Young as she was, she wore a dignity of manner which forbade any liberty.

He remembered that he had kissed her before the cathedral gate at Zaragoza, and flushed like a school-boy at the remembrance.

"I do not know what to say to you, how to thank you," he stammered.

"I need no thanks," she exclaimed; "those thank me best who serve the Fatherland. God guard you, my English friend, in the new life you have chosen."

She gave rein to her horse, and galloped into the forest. He saw her for a moment upon the edge of the thicket through which she must pass to come out upon the road they had left. She kissed her hand prettily to him, and with that disappeared from his sight.

And then he realized that he was alone in the woods, in the home of the man who, last night, had burnt the castle of La Santa Cruz, and had brought the peasants to their knees in awe of him.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP IN THE FOREST

THE glen was still as death. Such breeze as the dawn had given fell away before the rising sun. Falconer could hear a mountain torrent bubbling and splashing in the heart of the thicket. Tinkling bells upon the distant high-road spoke of a *diligence* passing. A bear burst from the bushes and went grunting into the woods. But there was no sign of man—nothing to tell the traveller that he was not alone in the forest.

It must have been past six o'clock then. He had not slept eight hours since he set foot in Spain. The temptation to throw himself down upon the soft grass and to let the great chestnut trees be the sentinels of sleep was difficult to resist. But curiosity prevailed. All the things he had seen, the stories he had heard, kept him waking and alert. The very mystery of the glen was a whip for the mind. The more he saw of it, the further he penetrated the depths of that shady glen, the greater was his desire to go on. What man, he asked, would make a home in such a place? Where was his house? what forbade the pretty gipsy going with him to its gates? The forest answered him with a rustle of shading leaves; the torrent splashed in its rocky bed and seemed to say, "A jest, a jest." He thought that he was the master of the glen, indeed—so little did he know.

There was a bridle path by the torrent's side, a soft track through sedgy grass and squelching bog. When he threw the reins upon his horse's neck, and let him go at his will, the beast followed the path readily, as though familiar with it. Thus it came that the horseman was carried to a very glade of leaves, to a bower aglow with green lights, walled by high bushes, wet with the freshening foam of the cascade. So near was he to the burn that the spray half blinded him when he stooped to some forbidding branch; often he thought that the willing beast he rode was about to step into the channel of the icy water. But the pony went on with a sure foot; and when they had followed the track, it may have been for the half of an hour, he neighed with pleasure, as though here was the end of it, and began to trot up the hillside. And so he brought his master to as picturesque a place as any in Spain or out of it.

An amphitheatre of the hills; a great circle of green grass cut in the very heart of the thicket! Mighty chestnut trees shaded it on all sides. The forest beyond was dark and thick, and often impenetrable. Falconer could see fair bowers with creepers and flowering shrubs knotted about the stately trunks; mazy paths wound their way into the heart of the copse; the torrent whirled down upon his right hand, falling here from slab to slab of marble into pools green with spongy mosses. A garden of the mountains, indeed! A haven of solitude surpassing all he had heard or read of.

In this theatre of Nature's wonders he drew rein a spell, to let his winded horse breathe. The further he went up the hillside the more foolish did the journey appear to be. He had ridden for the half

of an hour, and had seen nothing of the man or of his house. He determined that if another mile gave him no more news of him, he would return to Zaragoza and to old Benjamin, and abandon the fool's errand for ever. As the thing turned out, the resolution was premature. For ten seconds had not passed since he came to the place when a rustling of the leaves upon his left hand told him that he was no longer alone. The barrel of a pistol held within an inch of his head added an unpleasant certainty to the surmise.

Not for a moment did he doubt that he had fallen into the hands of the gentleman of the mountains; and it occurred to him, for humorous thoughts will arise even in moments of peril, that a man who had enjoyed at no distant date the hospitality of the Official Receiver in London was scarcely such a prize as even a fourth-rate brigand might aspire to.

"Gentlemen," he said, springing lightly from his horse, "you have made some mistake."

The man who held the pistol lowered it and smiled. He was tall for a Spaniard, and had a certain air which was not the air of a cut-throat. His clothes were of black velvet, very rich and new; a diamond ring of undoubted value glistened upon the finger which hooked the trigger of his revolver. He wore a *sombrero* hat with white feathers in it, a decoration imitated by four of his fellows who had come out of the thicket to stand with him. The same richness of dress and ease of manner marked the new-comers, who appeared to carry no arms nor to think arms necessary.

"Señor," said the man with the pistol, in answer to the protest, "there is no mistake. You are the Englishman, Captain Noel Falconer."

The other looked at him, astonished that he should have his name.

"And if I am, señor?"

"If you are, señor, you will please to tell me your business at Torla."

It was clear to Falconer that the man knew his business as well as he did. To have bandied words with him in such a place and at such a time would have been the amusement of a madman.

"My business is with the Prince," Falconer answered unhesitatingly. "I have come from London to see him."

The stranger bowed and thrust his pistol into his belt; the others began to stare at the speaker, yet not so plainly that he could take offence at it. When they had exchanged a few words together, and had come to some agreement, the man who first spoke—he of the velvet breeches and the red beard—continued with it.

"Captain," he said, "if you will come with me, I will take you to my master."

He beckoned one of the others to lead the horse; and, without more ado, crossed the amphitheatre. There was the mouth of a path opening there, narrow and tortuous, and almost hidden by the flowering shrubs which bordered it. This new track the two followed, perhaps, for the third part of a mile, going upward all the time. Then, without warning, it ceased, and they stood in a little glade where a tent of boughs had been built and a camp pitched.

Falconer had seen some picturesque things in his life, but that camp in the heart of the forest of Torla remained one of the treasures of memory. Quite suddenly, out of the darker maze of the thicket, they

passed to a park worthy of his own England; to a scene which recalled to him all the childish stories of Robin Hood and the merry men of history. Here, beneath magnificent trees, a dozen men were enjoying their siesta. Some in hammocks, some at all their length upon the grass, some seated before a table, the cloth of which was like a coverlet of snow, they slept or chatted, or smoked in dreamy indolence. The June sun which scourged the burning plains below was to them a friend of sleep. Canopies of leaves, cunningly entwined, sheltered the idlers from the fierce light. Breezes blowing down from the icy peaks above tempered the air so that it was a joy to live. The traveller seemed to have been carried upon the wings of magic out of the world of reality to a dreamland surpassing all the fairy pictures of his childhood. The promises of Isabella de Gavarnie came leaping to his mind—the promise of fortune beyond his hopes, of a life like no other in the world. In such an Eldorado of the mountains, he said, it would be happiness enough to live and die.

His guide led him to this place unchallenged by any sentry, unannounced by any sign or word. Even more astonishing was the indifference displayed by those he now came among to his approach, or to the fact that a stranger stood at their gates. Not a man so much as turned his head. The loiterers at the table, busy with their cigarettes and wine flasks, scarce gave him a look. In turn, he passed them indifferently, following his guide to the tent of which he had spoken; to an arbour of leaves and flowers built against the trunk of a mighty tree, yet guarded by no other sentinel than a huge boarhound.

"Señor," cried the guide, while the hound began to cool his nose against the leather of his boots, "if you will wait here a moment, the Prince will see you."

He disappeared into the arbour, and his voice was heard there. Before ten seconds had passed, he came to the door again and beckoned Falconer to follow him.

And so he brought him face to face with Lorenzo de la Cruz, that soldier of fortune at whose name, as Isabella de Gavarnie promised him, all Europe was soon to tremble.

CHAPTER X

LORENZO DE LA CRUZ

THE guide apart, there were two in the arbour when Falconer entered. Of these, one was a mere lad, a hunchback with a fair, boyish face, who sat at a plain deal writing-table tracing lines upon a map of France. The other was a man, remarkable enough to have attracted attention in any company.

Lorenzo the Magnificent, the man he had crossed France to find—to him Falconer first turned. He perceived a Spaniard of the middle height, clothed in a loose suit of white canvas—a man who had the face of the classic Greek, long and thin, and seen to the best advantage in profile. Black hair, coarse and glossy, curled upon his high and striking forehead; his eyes protruded as the eyes of a victim to insomnia. The breadth of the man, the development of limb and body, would have won the admiration of an athlete. Moreover, his hands were small as those of a woman; his feet scarce showed beneath his ample trousers. Not until he spoke could one forget these physical contrasts. But directly he opened his lips, one impression alone was possible—the impression of personal power, of domination, of tremendous will. His gesture was the gesture of the autocrat. His glance seemed to approve or to condemn.

Such was the man who paced the arbour in the strange camp above the hamlet of Torla. What-

ever had occupied his mind when the Englishman came up occupied it still. He spoke no word of greeting; seemed oblivious of the presence of a stranger. Steadily from end to end of the room, from end to end and back again, went the thick-set, burly, bull-necked figure. His shirt of fine cambric was opened at the throat; there were spots of ink upon his white canvas trousers; his coat was put on anyhow, and the sleeves of it were turned up above his wrists. He wore no jewellery; he carried no arms. If they had not been in Spain, Falconer would have said that he was a prosperous landowner busy with the affairs of his estate. But he knew that he was not—he knew that he had seen him (for instinct told him so) riding last night at the head of the white horsemen who burned the castle of La Santa Cruz. And he could not but ask himself, was this the man he had come to Spain to serve—against the world, as the woman promised him?

The master of the camp—for he did not doubt that this was the master—broke the strange silence at last, dramatically, and with a Spaniard's gesture. Halting unexpectedly, he began to stare at his guest as though awaiting his word.

"Well!" he exclaimed, in perfect English—and that was all.

Falconer shook off the spell which the searching gaze had put upon him and answered readily:

"I have come to offer you my help. My name is Noel Falconer; I was recently——"

"In the 10th Hussars," he interposed; adding a gesture as much as to say, "I know that well."

"Señor," said the other, "if you know me, there is no need for me to speak."

The Spaniard clasped his hands behind his back and began to walk up and down the room again. His mind had gone back to the map of France lying there upon the writing-table. He stopped to trace a line upon it with a pencil snatched from the fingers of the hunchback.

"We shall go that way," he said to the lad decisively. "I do not wish to hear any argument. Let Jussuf be ready at midnight with twenty men. He will strip the house and bring the horses here. Afterwards he will come to me for orders—you understand. Then write—write it quickly."

The hunchback took the pen in his hands while his master paced the room twice.

"Well, have you done it, Ximeno?"

"I have begun it, Prince."

"Begun it; holy God! that I should be kept waiting like this."

A pettier ebullition of temper was not to be conceived. He might have been some peevish woman rating a housemaid. But the surprise to the Englishman was that the lad at the table took no notice whatever of his scolding. He continued placidly to write. The other, meanwhile, had condescended to remember his guest, and to stare at him again.

"What is your name?" he asked, forgetting that he had already uttered it.

"My name is Noel Falconer. Shall we write it down?"

He shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "a fool's jest."

"You have come here from London, Captain Falconer?"

"From London."

"Then you shall tell me your story?"

He threw himself, with the air of one greatly fatigued, upon a wicker sofa, and motioned the other to sit beside him. Falconer could see that he was watching him keenly and waiting for his words.

"My story is a short one," he said simply. "I am a man without money or friends. All I know of life has been learned with the English army. Three months ago I resigned my commission in the 10th Hussars. To-day I come to Spain believing that a new commission will be offered to me."

"You believe that! Why do you believe it?"

"The things I see around me; the things I saw in the hills last night."

"You came through the hills, then?"

"Certainly."

For a moment he appeared to debate upon it; then he turned the subject.

"You can drill a division of cavalry, Captain?"

"It would be strange if I could not."

"And were the finest swordsman in your regiment?"

"They said so."

"You have knowledge of tactics; you have studied the science of war?"

"That is the one thing I have studied."

"You know something of artillery?"

"As much as a cavalry officer ever knows."

"You are honest at least?"

"Honesty is the riches of a poor man."

"And this honest man comes here to help me? He knows something of the service, then?"

"He knows nothing, Prince."

"But he has the wish to learn?"

"He has the wish to quit a life which is a curse to him; he has the wish to own a horse again—the wish to forget that his name is a byword in England,"

He nodded his head at the words, as though they pleased him. Then he rose from his seat to go and look over the shoulder of the lad Ximeno. Five minutes must have passed before he spoke again.

"Come," he said, folding his arms and posing in one of those dramatic attitudes which were as ridiculous as they were frequent, "who sent you to this place?"

It was the question Falconer had dreaded all along. He remembered Madame de Gavarnie's warnings. Yet what tale could he tell?

"Well," he said at last, "they told me of you in Zaragoza."

"That is a lie," cried the Spaniard angrily. "This honest man begins well; he tells me a lie."

"Did you suppose that I would tell you the truth?"

"Captain Falconer," was the answer, "a lie is a poor introduction to Lorenzo de la Cruz."

"Then let us have no lies. I came to you because a friend of yours told me that you wished for help. What matter who the friend was? If he spoke well, and you seek swords, here is a man ready to serve you—a man who can find no other vocation in life but that of the soldier—a man who has yet the best part of his life to live? If your service is such as he may embark upon——"

He hushed him with a gesture of his hand.

"You lied to me," he reiterated in peevish anger. "I do not want to hear you; I have no place for you——" and then, looking to the guide, he said:

"Take this man away."

He turned upon his heels, and went over to the

table again. If he had struck a blow, the insult could not have been greater. Nor did Falconer know what kept him from the answer he would have returned to any other living man.

"Señor," he said, "there is no need to take me away, nor is there any man in Torla who could do that for you."

The Spaniard did not seem to hear him; he turned to the guide again.

"Will you not obey me?" he cried. "Take that man away, and do not let me see his face again."

The next moment they were out in the air again.

"Well," Falconer asked, "and what now?"

"Excellency," said the guide, "when the sun sets, you will have ceased to live."

CHAPTER XI

THE PRISON OF THE TORRENT

“**W**HEN the sun sets, you will have ceased to live.”

Falconer stepped back and looked at the man. Was he, then, a *farceur* too? Had some great jest been played as his welcome to the mountains? The man's face gave him no for an answer. He seemed to read pity there.

“Come,” said he, “we have talked nonsense enough. If your master has no need of my services, who is to prevent me returning to Torla?”

“We shall prevent you, Excellency.”

He put a whistle to his lips and blew it shrilly. The answer was worthy of the place. Scarce had the note done echoing in the hills before six men stood at the fellow's side; and in the hand of each there glistened the barrel of a pistol.

“We shall prevent you, Excellency,” he repeated, as he pointed to the grim figures around him. “Lift but a finger and your last minute has come.”

Falconer shrugged his shoulders.

“One man does not fight six,” he said contemptuously.

“Not at all—he follows them.”

The trooper made a sign, and the six, all wearing Spanish capes and sombrero hats, closed about

their prisoner and began to march up the hillside. Presently they struck upon a path winding into a higher, wood of pines. Falconer looked down, and saw the camp below—a nest cut out from the very heart of the forest. The idlers there were still seated at the table. Servants moved in and out between the trees, bearing dishes and flasks of wine. Ximeno, the hunchback, stood at the door of the arbour. Apparently he had finished the instructions to Jussuf.

Even upon those heights above the glen the heat was almost unendurable. Falconer loosened the cloak, and carried it upon his arm. The travelling coat which old Benjamin had bought for him weighed heavy as a wrap of furs. Moreover, he had ridden all night, and his limbs were so stiff that he stumbled often as he walked. For the threat of the man who guided him he did not care a scudo. Yet what was about to happen, what the night was to bring, he knew no more than the dead.

Upward and still upward—he began to think at last that they would carry him to the very summit of the mighty mountain which towered, a monarch of the peaks, above that valley of forest. The pine woods seemed interminable; his fatigue was so great, his hunger for sleep so dreadful, that at last he stopped altogether, and thought that he must swoon.

“Do what you like,” he said; “I go no further.”

The troop halted, pressing closely about him. Some one put a flask to his lips, and he drank a long draught. The guide, he who spoke kindly from the first, patted him upon the arm encouragingly.

“Excellency,” he said, “it is not a hundred paces now. Take courage.”

They gave him the support of their arms, and so

they went on. He remembered little of that walk, save that it carried him ever upward; over a carpet of moss; beneath a roof of pines. When the pines ceased, he stood before a sheer precipice, at the foot of the mighty mountain itself; and in the face of the precipice there was a wicket gate, barred with iron as the gate of a cage. The leader of the troop opened the grating with a key, and the prisoner followed him into a great cave cut out from the rock of the mountain. But he had no will nor strength to examine the place, and seeing a rude bed of straw before him, he threw himself down upon it and instantly fell asleep.

It was late in the day when, with heavy limbs and parched lips, he awoke. He observed that some one had set a loaf of coarse bread and a bottle of wine by his side. The liquor was harsh and sour; but he drank a deep draught of it and then began to examine his prison. From the first moment of waking he had been conscious of a curious moaning noise in his ears; and now, when he began to look about him, the secret of the sounds was disclosed. The cave had but three walls to it. The fourth wall was a fierce cascade, roaring down through a vast tunnel to join some river of the valley below. No stranger prison ever was built. The companionship of that black river falling from the breast of the mountain above, and showing to the prisoner a face of glittering waters, was worthy of the Spanish race. He could well imagine the victim of captivity tempted by the weird voice of the torrent until he cast himself headlong into its waters, and found a tomb beneath the mountains.

Elsewhere, the cave was large and lofty, one of the limestone caves common to the district of Torla.

Depending stalactites of great beauty were the natural ornaments of its high-pitched roof. An unseen window gave light other than that of the gate of bars through which the prisoner had passed. A glow of the sinking sun shone warm upon its splendid pinnacles, and showed a thousand lights playing over the wall of waters. Falconer could well have imagined himself in some cathedral forgotten by man, but existing still to the glory of Nature's God. The view through the bars of the gate helped him to the thought. He could look thence upon the silent forest; could see the izzard leaping from crag to crag; could hear the tinkle of distant bells. But no human thing was there. The sinking sun lighted a scene of desolation and of solitude. He asked himself, what of the man, what of the camp? The music of the torrent was his answer.

"When the sun sets, you will have ceased to live."

He repeated the words, laughing at them, yet unable to silence them in his ears. He was but thirty years of age, and misfortune had left his hunger for life unsatisfied. What if the rising sun of to-morrow shone down upon his grave? The mystery of death would be a mystery to him no longer. A trench cut in the hills would be his bed; the water soaking through the soil his meat and drink. And he had left England for this. For this the gipsy girl had led him through the mountains—that he should be shot down by a man whose name he did not know at the dawn of the day. Rage at his impotence, at the grotesque folly which had brought him to such a place, came upon him as a fever.

The red light vanished from the pine woods; the sky was no longer aflame with crimson radiance; the

misty greys of night began to gather over the mountains. The sun would set in ten minutes, he said. Yet no one came to him. Silence reigned in the woods; he could hear no step upon the moss without. As the minutes were numbered, he began to watch the passing of the day with a sick man's fear of the darkness. Five minutes, ten minutes! No longer a cap of light upon the snows above. A little spell of waiting, and still he stood alone!

From this time he shut his eyes and began to count the minutes. "It would be dark in five minutes, in ten," he said. When next he looked out toward the woods, a file of men stood before the gate and a priest was unlocking the door. The hour had come, then; the man had not jested! He drew his cloak around him and turned to the priest. After all, he was a soldier, and had been with death before that day.

"Excellency," said the old man, advancing into the prison and laying a gentle hand upon his arm, "you know why I have come here?"

"I know nothing."

The priest shook his head.

"You are of our blessed faith?" he asked.

"I am an Englishman, and have English friends."

"You would listen to me if I speak to you?"

"By all means, if you have anything to tell me."

"You will listen to me because you are going to die."

"In that case we waste time. I have only one favour to ask—be quick with it."

The priest raised his hands, as though to say, "It is not my word." Falconer remembered afterwards that his benign and kindly face was the only face he saw when they tied a bandage round his eyes and set his

back against the wall. Of other recollections he retained few. It was in his memory that he felt behind him with his hands to be sure that he stood quite close to the rock. His dread of falling face downward when the bullets struck him was childish.

So swiftly had it all come about—the appearance of the men before the door of the prison, the flicker of torch-light within the great cell, the questions of the kindly old priest—that this strange thought of a hurt from the fall alone possessed his mind. Not for an instant was he troubled with any of those visions of a forgotten past which tradition has found for the dying man. He did not realize that a little pressure of a man's finger upon the trigger of a gun would solve for him the eternal mystery of life, and that which comes after life. There was no dread of the physical aspect of death—of the sudden stilling of the heart, of the quiver of muscles paralysed. He feared only that he must tumble headlong upon the rock, and, tumbling, would cut his face against the upstanding crags.

Ten seconds passed, it may have been, before a voice was raised in the cave. He tried to count the moments, saying to himself: "I shall fall now; now the bullets will strike me." When the order was given, and the snap of the rifles shutting at the breach struck upon his ears, he could distinguish the quick breathing of men around him, even the whisper of their words above the moan of the torrent. He remembered then that those who are shot do not hear the report which follows upon the flight of the bullet. The first indifference to his situation became an agony of suspense, and he cried out to them that they should be quick with it. The twitching of the muscles about his

heart was as a pain of knives. He began to recollect that the bullets would crush his forehead and that he would feel them splitting the bone. And still no bullet struck him; still his nervous fingers touched the sharp face of the rock behind him.

Save for the order of the man who commanded the file, there had been no human sound in the cavern during all this agony of death anticipated. Once or twice Falconer heard a whisper of voices, but so low that he could make nothing of the words nor of the speakers. Nor could he imagine at all why they should thus delay, unless it were that they waited for some one in authority to come to the place. But such a supposition was not in accord with the command to "Make ready," which even his poor Spanish permitted him to understand. He judged that their design was to torture him with a spell of waiting, and upon that he implored them again, for God's sake, to shoot him.

"We do not shoot brave men, Captain Falconer."

The answer came to him as a voice from another world. It seemed to echo, in the very depths of the cavern, a message of friendship and goodwill. He heard the words clearly, yet could not realize the meaning of them. Death, which had been his neighbour, still touched him with his icy fingers. He waited still for the bullets to strike him.

"For the love of God, do your work," he cried.

The man who had spoken (and his was a voice not to be forgotten) advanced across the cave with slow steps. He tore the bandage from the prisoner's eyes and cast it on the floor. When sight returned to him, Falconer found himself alone in the prison with Lorenzo de la Cruz.

The Spaniard was dressed in the light blue uniform of a Spanish lancer, but he carried no sword, and the dress sat ill upon his unshapely figure. Some one had set a torch in a crevice of the rock, and this cast a glow upon his white and thoughtful face, so that it was like the face of one new risen from a bed of sickness. The same magnetism of the eyes, which had bewitched the traveller in the hour of morning, was potent even in the shadows of the cave.

"No," he said, laying his hand upon the Englishman's shoulder, with a gesture of affection, "we do not shoot brave men, Captain Falconer. And a brave man has been sent to us. You fear, and yet you are silent. Behold the man whom I am seeking. I have watched you where you stood. And I see the friend of Lorenzo de la Cruz, the friend who looks into the eyes of death and does not turn away."

Falconer laughed brusquely; a retort rose to his lips, but the Spaniard cut him short.

"Come," he cried, "and hear what sort of a friend you have found."

He waited, for no reply, but turned upon his heel and walked to the gate whereby his servants waited. Falconer followed him in wondering silence, scarce knowing whether they had waked him or had left him to the dream of his heavy sleep. All that had passed seemed something of years remote and not of moments lately numbered. He realized vaguely that his courage had been put to the proof; yet recalled how poor a proof it had been. There was not in his mind any thankfulness of the escape. Never once from the beginning of it had the scene been real to him. It was less real when he followed him they called the Prince up the mountain side to his home, and the light of

many lanterns cast a rocking glow upon the bridle-path they trod.

Whither did he go? whither, and upon what errand? Into what strange company had he fallen? Who was the ruler of this kingdom of the mountains?

He could not answer the questions which his mind asked, but wondering always, he followed Lorenzo to his house above the valley.

CHAPTER XII

A MAN NOT AS OTHER MEN

THOUGH no moon had risen, the night was clear and generous of stars. Cool and refreshing breezes breathed upon his face when Falconer left the cavern. He could see the twinkling lights of Torla far down in the hollow ; the woods wherein Lorenzo's men had taken their *siesta* were black shapes clinging to the precipice. But the path lay upwards toward the crags and steepes of the mighty mountains ; and when they had followed it by the lantern's light for the half of a mile or less, they left the last clump of pines behind them and stood before the house of which the man had spoken.

They tell in Arragon of the centuries which have contributed to the history of the Castle of Torla. When first Falconer saw it standing under the cliff of the heights, it seemed to him that the great mountain spread wings of rock above the castle to shield it from the heavens and from man. Perched there, in the shelter of the precipice, with a tableland of soft grass before its walls, and the sheer rock as a remoter gate, it must, he thought, have been a castle impregnable in the days when men fought face to face, and the strategy of generals was of less worth than the valour of those that waged the fight. Only time had prevailed against it, and prevailing, had cast down its battlements and rotted its timbers and

opened many a window to the storms of the pass, to the whirling snow, and the victory of winds. Yet even time had left to it a suggestion of power and grandeur; and its great keep stood up triumphant, a beacon of the mountains, a monument of the mighty dead who had fallen in the courts below.

"There is my home," said Lorenzo, halting a moment upon the plateau as they debouched from the wood; "to-day there is hardly one stone left upon another. But we shall rebuild it, Captain; we shall make it worthy of those who have gone before—worthy of them, and of Spain."

"That would not be difficult—it is a home of your family, of course?"

A shadow of impatience passed across the dark face.

"It will be the home of my family—when my work is finished. Have you heard of Philip of Gavarnie, Captain?"

"Certainly; was he not in command of the White Hussars when Don Carlos was driven out of Spain?"

"You know his story, I see. That is well, for it will help you to understand me when I speak presently."

He was silent upon this, for the Englishman's answer had set him thinking. When he began to talk again, it was as though none listened.

"Ay, for a truth," he exclaimed, "they drove him out of Spain; but a king will come back to them. They struck down Philip; but his children's children will rule them. They scattered his armies; but a new army will arise to build up a new Spain. To-night we are phantoms of the hills; to-morrow must find us the masters of the world."

Long he stood, a quaint, ungainly figure, clear to be seen in the lantern's light. Not a man of those around

ventured a word. An indescribable, haunting fascination held them to the place. When the mood passed, he turned abruptly, and entered the house.

"Come," he said sharply, "the night wind is not our friend. And dinner is waiting for us, Captain."

An old servant, Damien, showed the way to a bedroom, plain and ill-furnished. When he was dressed, he found Lorenzo in a small dining-room below. The Spaniard also had changed his dress since they came up from the cavern, and wore the glittering white and gold uniform of the older companies of Spanish hussars. An order—a Brazilian order—was among his decorations; his coarse hair had been brushed with great care; he had the aspect of one unaccustomed to the cares of dress, yet submitting to them if occasion demanded. Two covers were set, and the old man Damien was the only servant. But the hunchback, Ximeno, sat at a writing-table in the corner of the room, and turned often to consult his master.

"You are hungry, Captain?" was the first question; "the hills give you good appetite? *Bueno*, we shall eat first and talk afterwards, and that will save time."

He made a sign to his servant, who set soup before them and a bottle of that superb wine of Arragon known as the Blanco Imperial. Falconer was not ordinarily a slow eater, but he had scarce lifted his spoon before Lorenzo had emptied his bowl and was ready for the dish to follow. When that was served (a mess of fowl in the Spanish fashion), the master of the house ate like a wolf, ravenously, almost ferociously, as though he had fasted for many hours. Not a word did he speak; never once did he raise his eyes from his plate. In fifteen minutes he had dined, and had eaten the dinner of three men.

"*C'est terminé*," he cried, turning to his guest with a brusque gesture; "I have not eaten for thirty hours, Captain. That is my custom—one meal a day if I can get it; if not, as much as possible when it comes to me. But I do not expect my guests to do as I do. Go on with your dinner while I talk to Ximeno."

He poured out a little of the white wine into a goblet brimmed with silver, and added a large quantity of aerated water to it. Then he addressed the hunchback.

"Is there any news, Ximeno?"

The lad looked at the stranger and hesitated.

"There is news from Madrid," he said reluctantly.

Lorenzo took the letter from his hand and glanced at it.

"Do not fear to speak to Captain Falconer," he exclaimed; "he is one of us. What is news for me is news for him. Remember that from this time."

He opened the letter and began to speak of it.

"It is the Marqués de Santillena who writes to me," he said, when he had put it down. "He is one of our friends at Madrid. We have few more staunch in all Spain."

"He sends you good news?"

"The best—a regiment of lancers is to be sent to Jaca to-morrow."

"You do not fear the regular troops, then?"

"The troops of Spain, Captain!"

"But they will send others—an army, perhaps."

"Let them come. They hunt the bird upon the wing—they set out to roll back the sea. When there is one among them that can cast down the mountains of Arragon, then will I fear them."

It was not the speech of a bravo or a fool; but the

word of one strong in the belief that the arm of God shielded him. Falconer thought that the love and trust of those who served such a man were not difficult to understand. One could not be in his presence five minutes and fail to know something of the magnetism of that strange personality. A born leader of men, indeed, as Isabella de Gavarnie had said,—perhaps even a king. Fools had won kingdoms before that day!

"No, for a truth, there is none in Spain that I fear, Captain," he went on, "none in Spain, none in Europe. You who come to me as a stranger do well to be incredulous. We shall alter all that when the proper time comes. Now let us go to my cabinet to smoke, for I have much to say to you."

They passed from the dining-room to a larger apartment at its rear. There were books here, an abundance of books, and low couches for idlers and soft rugs for the feet. But the ornament which stood out most prominently was a marble bust of the first Napoleon. Falconer did not fail to remark that a full-length portrait of the Emperor hung above the mantelshelf. Did the Spaniard, then, imagine that the cloak of the "Little Corporal" had fallen upon his shoulders? Or were these things set up as the standards of his work? Lorenzo satisfied his curiosity even as he put the question.

"You were interested in the Corsican?" he asked, while his man offered them cigars, and coffee with an aroma of the East. "You know something of his early life?"

"As much as the average man, which is a good deal nowadays, when every other book has the Corsican for its subject."

"Then you understand why I have his picture here? What one man has done another can do. We learnt that maxim in our schooldays; few of us practise it. I am one of the few, and I never rise from my bed but I say to myself, he made his children kings. As he did, so will I do. His equipment was a little knowledge of the mathematics and a larger belief in himself. My equipment is the friendship of two hundred and fifty tried friends, and a hundred thousand pounds of your English money in my bank. What I lack in the arts of war, my soldier friends shall make good. I count you now among the number, and there is none in my little army who comes to me so opportunely. Serve me faithfully, and I will make your name great in all Europe. Cast your lot in with mine, and you shall draw a prize of fame, of riches, of renown beyond your dreams. Fidelity to my cause, the honour of a brave man. There are my conditions of service. That you are a brave man the little jest we played upon you last night convinces me. For the rest, I ask no oath; I do not wish to bind you with any bond but your word, the word of an honourable Englishman. Give me that, and I will answer you, here and now, with the rank of Captain in the White Hussars of Gavarnie. Refuse me, and I will say, 'Go'; but beware how you deal with me. Do you understand my proposition, Captain? It is clear to you. Then ask me any questions you wish, and I will answer you."

He lit his cigar and began to pace the room, his hands crossed behind his back. Every movement, every gesture, the poise of the head, the shape of the face, recalled the gestures and the movements of the Corsican who was his model. As for the question, his promises, his threats, they left the man who heard

them where he was. He knew no more of his host than he had known yesterday.

"Prince," he said, after a spell of silence, "let us begin with the promise and not with the threat. And remember that at present I know nothing of you, nor of the troop you are raising. If I am to join you, your cause must be my cause. I must share the hopes and the ambitions you speak of. I must share the spirit of the men I am to command. Can you tell me nothing of these things?"

Lorenzo stopped abruptly in his walk and pinched the other's ear. Falconer remembered that Napoleon was wont to indulge his favourites with such a token of pleasure.

"A wise man, a wise man," he cried affectionately. "Whom have you come here to serve? *Eccoli*, that is the question! Behold the man of deeds who does not understand anything else. I will be frank with you, my friend—frank as you are frank. You come here to serve Lorenzo de la Cruz, who, twenty years ago, was a lieutenant in that regiment of hussars which went over to Don Carlos, and was disbanded when the cause fell. They banished me to the Brazils. A hundred of those who loved the old service went with me. To-day we are back in Spain again; we have come to reckon with our enemies. The White Hussars of Gavarnie ride once more in the mountains. The peasants call them phantoms of the hills; but they are no phantoms. They are men like yourself—men drawn to me as to one born to lead them. Their homes are in every country in Europe. I summon them, and they come to me. I say go, and the hills are empty again; the fires die down, the phantoms are no more. Some of

them are rich men, who seek a glorious service of arms ; some are adventurers ; others are sons of ruined houses, who ask that I shall make them great ; a few are soldiers, driven from their regiments, as you have been driven, by poverty and by shame. For all of these I find a work to do. They are my army ; to-night an army of two hundred and fifty men. My country waits for a leader who shall make her great again. I, Lorenzo, am the leader. In a few weeks all Arragon will be in arms. Biscay will follow Arragon. We shall number a hundred thousand troops and march to Madrid. The rich men of the world will provide us with money. I shall burn their houses and loot their banks. Once master of Spain, I shall turn to France, to poor France waiting for one to lead her. I shall make myself master of France and pilt her against Germany. Germany will fall and open the gate to Russia. I shall join the navies of the world and turn them against your England. She will come over to me, and help me to rule the world. A dream, you say ? I ask you, did not the Corsican dream as I have dreamed ? Ay, indeed, a dream ; but the dream of one sent from God to bring justice to his people."

His words died down until they were but a murmur of speech. Falconer remembered him long afterwards, standing there with the lamplight upon his strange face, and his eyes shining with the spirit of a fanatic. The fascination of the man's personality, the majestic force of it, was not to be described. That musical, winning voice was the enemy of all reason. The heart of the man who listened began to quicken as it had quickened when first he saw the White Hussar in the mountains.

"Prince," he said earnestly, "I accept the command you offer me."

Lorenzo raised his hands dramatically. "I thank God," he said simply.

"You have need of me at once?"

"At once, Captain. For some days, at any rate, you will remain here as my guest. Thereafter, we shall find a house for you in some place where we have need of a house. There are fifty homes of your comrades in Europe to-day; there will be five hundred before the year has run. For the present you are attached to my staff here. When midnight has struck, I will present those comrades to you; until then, you may be glad to go into the gardens to think of all this. But do not say that, because I leave you, this hour is not precious to me. Of all the friends this year has brought to me, the English hussar—the master of war, as report tells me—is the best. And I shall know how to reward his service, Captain. Let us drink a cup of wine to the White Hussars of Gavarnie—the phantoms of the mountains—a health to them and to their comrades."

He drained the cup at a draught, and bade his guest go to the gardens.

"Or if you will, to your bed," said he; "for myself I sleep four hours in twenty, but I have learned the habit."

The valley, hushed to the music of sleep, seemed a haven remote from man and the works of man when Falconer came out to the gardens of the house. He listened to the music of cascades; to the dulcet harmonies of the night wind striking a chord of melancholy in the rugged glens above Torla. He could not believe that the White Hussars had ridden these but yesterday; that the hills had resounded with

the voices of a people fallen down to worship the messenger of God. Still less could he tell himself that these men were now his comrades; that, to-morrow, it might be, he would ride with them and share the homage of those who looked for a king to come to Arragon. He would not believe; yet the reality of the night was not to be cloaked. It came back to him swiftly, and suddenly, from the shadows of the valley—a vision, as the vision of yesterday—the horsemen themselves coming at the gallop to their homes above the forests.

The blast of a bugle sounded in the pine forests waked him from his dreams. A little while he waited, and then out of the darkness of the woods there rode the glittering troop which yesterday had sent the men of Jaca to their knees. No more than fifty in number now, nevertheless, the vision of that glorious company, its habiliments shining in the clear light of the moon as with a glow of jewels, its plumes waving in the wind, its swords as blades of silver, surpassed aught that he had read or dreamed of. And this was the miracle of its coming, that Lorenzo himself rode at the head of them.

Lorenzo, indeed, he who had sat at his table not five minutes ago! Falconer watched him as though some miracle was being wrought before his very eyes. He recalled the words of Isabella de Gavarnie:

“A man not as other men. A man able to scorn time and place and country.”

She had spoken the truth, then. And for that he had been sent to Spain!

CHAPTER XIII

XIMENO PROVES A PHILOSOPHER

THE horsemen disappeared into the wood of pines where Lorenzo had pitched his tent at the dawn of the day. But Falconer's eyes were still upon the valley. It was as though he waited for a new illusion, or thought to see another company of Hussars rise up from the shadows of the night.

Ten minutes must have passed before he stirred from the spot. An outpost of filmy cloud shadowed the moon then, and left the hither valley in darkness. He drew his cloak about him and thought to return to the house, but, in the moment of irresolution, a hand was laid upon his arm, and he turned quickly, to find Lorenzo at his side.

"Well," said the Spaniard, in the tone of one who asks a question of no interest, "you have seen your comrades?"

"They passed into the wood yonder when the clock of Torla was striking eleven. I thought that you rode at the head of them."

Lorenzo laughed softly. The grip of his fingers was tightened when he answered,—

"A soldier does not think; he makes sure."

"Then I was mistaken?"

"I did not say so."

He dropped his hand and stood looking out over the valley.

"The man who would lead must not be as other men," he exclaimed, very earnestly, "and I am sent from God, Captain. The people say so. Do not ask why. It would be profitless."

"I have asked nothing," was the curt reply.

The impatience of the answer was lost upon the Spaniard. He waited still a little while, gazing down towards Torla. When a few minutes had passed, Falconer observed a lantern swinging in the trees of the lower wood, and his knowledge of the heliograph was sufficient to tell him that some one was making a signal to them. Lorenzo read the signal, and it seemed to please him. He turned once more and pinched his companion's ear, as he had done after dinner.

"You would begin your service, Captain; then you shall begin now? You shall meet your comrades before the hour strikes again. Did I not tell you that the troops are coming from Madrid? Very well; you shall ride and see them. You shall hear my answer to those who would hunt me at Torla."

He turned back to the house, where Ximeno, now booted and spurred, awaited him.

"Ximeno," he said, "let the horses be brought, and for Captain Falconer a sword. He carried pistols with him from Zaragoza. Let him find them in his holsters."

Ten minutes afterwards they quitted the castle, and rode down towards Torla. Falconer found himself side by side with the hunchback, the sanest man he had yet found in Spain.

"So you are going to meet the troops from Madrid, Ximeno?" he asked.

The lad gave him a frank look, and nodded his head.

"It is a long journey?"

"It is an hour's ride, Excellency. We shall find them above Jaca. After that, there is the house of the man who sent them to Torla. To-morrow the peasants will dig its ruins, and only the smoke will be left."

"A noble work, indeed—you think it so, Ximeno?"

"I—oh, I think nothing. It is not my business to think. Am I not the servant of one sent from God?"

Falconer looked at him questioningly. The tone of his answer was unmistakable. He, at least, boy that he was, did not deceive himself concerning the man he served. Such a discovery was wonderful among the wonders of the night.

"Come, my friend," said Falconer, driving his pony close to the other; "it is plain to me that you do not think it is a noble work."

It was a direct invitation to be frank, but, with a Spaniard's instinct, the lad preferred to feel his way.

"No," he cried, "I do not say that, Captain. The man who draws cheques for thousands must make a blot upon the paper sometimes. If we are brigands to-night, we may be princes to-morrow. It is all a question of degree."

"You believe that the army has a future?"

"I wait and see. Who can tell what two hundred and fifty well-drilled men with a wise head to lead them cannot do? The Prince has spoken to you to-night, and you are one of us. You know that his friends do not flock together like sheep. Their homes are in all countries. Some are in Russia, many in the south-east of Europe, many in remote cities of Spain. A signal summons them where we will. They do their work and go, one by one, to their homes again.

What Government, what police can hunt down an army like that? Did not a mob once hold your own London for three hours, in spite of all your police and guards? We are not a mob. We have among our number some of the finest horsemen in Europe, some of the cleverest generals. Every movement of every man is calculated as the movements of a machine. Search for us in Spain, and we are in France. Cross to France, and we are in Russia. Go to Russia, and we are back in Spain again. A merry game, I swear, Captain, and profitable to those who play it. Do you wonder that I refuse to speak of its future? Is not the present enough? We live like kings—we have good horses, good homes. We never want money. Let us live for the present, and leave the future to God."

He laughed merrily again and offered his new friend a cigarette.

"*Hola!*" he cried, "that I should talk like a wise man, I who have not lived twenty years yet.' It is for you to think of these things, Captain Falconer—for those who do not carry a curse upon their shoulders. If I were such as you, life would be well when it gave me a good horse and a sword at my belt. God knows, I would have made a good soldier, Captain. In my sleep I ride the hills, and there is no braver sword than mine. Then I wake—and it is this."

He pointed with a light gesture to his shoulders. The swift change from a childish gaiety to this deep sorrow of his infirmity was pitiable enough; but before Falconer could answer him they found the Spaniard waiting at a turn of the road, where a little clearing had been made in the forest, giving a grassy space sufficient for a squadron to bivouac. Lorenzo

was halted in the middle of the path; and he sat there with so little movement that the moonlight seemed to shine down upon a figure of bronze. The woods themselves were silent with the deeper silence of night. The breeze had died down, until it was but a tremor of the higher branches. The roar of cascades, or the thunder of the snows in the lonely heights of the pass, was no longer to be heard. The three horsemen might have been a hundred miles from civilization and from its cities. Yet they had waited but a little while in this place of silence, when Lorenzo raised his sword, and instantly a man rode out of the nearest wood and stood at the salute before him.

The new-comer was clothed from head to foot in white: gold lace glittered upon his tunic and pelisse; the hilt of his sword was of gold and ivory. He rode a magnificent black horse, which carried a shabracque of scarlet, edged with silver lace. At a hazard, he might have been written down as one of the German Imperial Guard, or of the Household Cavalry at Petersburg. But when he spoke, it was evident that he came from the south-east of Europe, and, as Falconer discovered upon a later day, he was a Roumanian.

"General Jussuf," said Lorenzo, greeting him with obvious affection, "here is our friend, Captain Falconer. Tell him that we welcome an English Hussar to the service."

"Most readily, Prince. He will not find a better welcome in the Pyrenees than from Gaspard Jussuf."

The greeting changed, he went on quickly to speak of the work of the night.

"You come at an opportune moment, Captain," he said. "There are a hundred of your comrades in the hills to-day, and they have to work, and not to play.

I hope that you will make me your friend, and command me as you please."

"Say rather that it will be my pleasure to obey you, General. Have I not come to Spain for that?"

"You have come to teach us many things that we do not know," was the answer; "and you will find us good pupils, Captain. To-morrow we will speak of it—there is work to be done to-night."

Saying this he wheeled his horse about and addressed himself to Lorenzo.

"You are ready, Prince?"

"I wait, Jussuf."

For a spell the two talked in whispers. Then the Spaniard raised his sword as he had done when he summoned Jussuf; and the silent forest quickened to life once more. Falconer had seen no spectacle so full of awe and mystery. For that, which had been a wood of sleep, hushed and still, and warm with the soft light of the moonbeams, became, on the instant, the home of ghostly shapes rising up as from the heart of the earth. No sooner had the shining sword of Lorenzo been raised in signal than horses trod the dewy lawns; white figures glittered among the trees; a rattle of harness and accoutrement warred upon the silence; a troop of hussars was created, a regiment brought into being before his eyes. Chosen men all; men coming from remote countries, Germans, Frenchmen, Russians, Roumanians, they formed up in line upon the sward, and stood halted there until the word should be given. And Falconer asked himself the while if they were creatures of the earth, or the phantoms which the peasants declared them to be.

Were these, then, the White Hussars of Gavarnie, the disbanded regiment born again in the secret places

of the mountains? Well might he who commanded them be proud of such servants. Superbly horsed, men of vast physique, men burning with zeal—they recalled the question of the philosopher Ximeno, "What police, what Government, could hunt them down?"

Lorenzo surveyed the troop with unconcealed satisfaction.

"My friends," he said, "I have found a comrade for you. Here is Captain Falconer, who comes to us from the Hussars of England. He will take the same rank in our company, for he knows many things of which we are ignorant. Show him to-night what sort of soldiers he will command."

The men saluted, and many eyes were turned toward the Englishman. But Lorenzo continued quickly,—

"Where is Major Georges?"

A young officer rode to the front.

"Here, Prince."

"You will be at Captain Falconer's side to-night. He will ride to the cross-road with you. Let him see the work and judge it. For the rest, use your discretion, and do not forget that the troops from Madrid are in the hills."

The Major saluted. General Jussuf gave the order to march. The troop moved away at a canter; but when they arrived at the cross-road before Torla, a squadron swept away to the right, and at the head of it went the Prince and General Jussuf.

"There is merry work for these fellows, Captain," said Major Georges boisterously; "they go to light us a candle. Come and see what kind of workmen we are."

Falconer did not answer him. Wondering still, he

followed his guide while he struck through the wood to a bridle path of the heights, wherefrom they could see the village of Torla and the road that led to it. While yet they were in the thicket a great light leaped up from the further side of the valley—so great a cloud of flame that the very trees lifted crimson boughs, and all the glades and bowers were illumined as by an unearthly radiance.

“Yonder,” cried Major Georges triumphantly, “yonder is our lantern, Captain.”

CHAPTER XIV

A REGIMENT OF DEVILS

THE men sat for many minutes watching the crest of flame and the cloud of smoke hovering above the distant thickets. There was no need for Falconer to ask what the meaning of that beacon was. "The house of the man who sends the troops to Torla." He recalled the words of the hunchback, spoken not an hour ago. The answer of the hillmen was there above the thickets, written upon the curtain of the night.

"Well," he said, letting his horse go on again, "it is a very good lantern, Major, from some points of view. Nevertheless, if your friends from Madrid are coming——"

"Are coming, Captain! *Santissima!*—it is late to think of that. They are there already at the gate of the town."

He pointed down to the road, a streak of silver in the valley's course. A company of lancers rode out of the gate of the town toward the burning house. Ill-dressed, slovenly, lacking vedettes or scouts, merry fellows abroad upon a merry occupation, they rode to the task. To them the affair was good to make a holiday. They had come to hunt down a handful of rebels. To-morrow they would hang the leaders of the revolt and return to their own city.

Major Georges pointed to the troop, and a smile of satisfaction crossed his face.

"You are in luck, Captain," he said grimly ; "our news was that we should hear of them to-morrow. They anticipate us by a day. So much the worse for them. They have a day less to live."

"You expected them, then ?"

"Certainly."

"To-night ?"

"To-night."

"And the place ?"

"The cross-road toward which they ride, Captain."

He did not speak as a boaster, but as one sure of his words, and to be justified by them.

"The Prince must have had news of them when he sent the others to the château," he continued, as though answering a question which had not been asked. "The fifty he took with him wait in the woods where the roads cross. You will hear their guns presently."

He took a cigarette from his case, but rolled it between his lips, and would not light it. His calm was well assumed, yet betrayed by the hand which trembled upon his bridle rein. Falconer, in his turn, did not attempt an argument. That Lorenzo would face even the troops of Spain was a boast he would have laughed at ten minutes ago. Yet here were the lancers upon the mountain road ; and there was a man who promised him that they had not ten minutes to live.

The troop rode on, fearing no surprise, nor prepared for one. Major Georges, following them with anxious eyes, spoke again when they were fifty paces from the cross-road.

"Look you, Captain," he said, with a dramatic gesture, "there is an odd sight, I swear. That great

tree under which their Colonel rides will be his gibbet to-morrow."

"The Colonel—they have sent a Colonel, then."

"The big fellow in the plumed hat. He has sworn to clear the hills of us in three days. *Quelle farce!* He has not three minutes to live."

He spoke as though in jest; yet the words had scarcely left his lips when the man and the boast were justified. The rattle of rifles, rolling from hill to hill, given back by glades remote, sent the horses of the two up upon their haunches. The very heart of the forest seemed to vomit flame. The troop halted as though a judgment of the unseen had come upon them. Men rolled in their saddles; horses lacking riders galloped wildly toward the heights. A surpassing silence fell again upon the hills.

Twenty of the troopers fell from their saddles, but of the rest not a man moved. They were looking at one another, as though asking whence the peril had come. A young officer tore at the sleeve of his coat, as though an iron were burning his arm. A trooper in the rear file sat stiff in his saddle, but when his horse moved a pace, he rolled over, and was dragged by the stirrup, for he was quite dead. The Colonel alone kept his head. His voice was heard commanding the troop to dismount; some of the men busied themselves with their carbines. Then the woods spoke again, and the unseen enemy was unseen no more.

With a loud shout, the shout of victory assured, with a glitter of gold and white, and the flash of swords in the air, the White Hussars dashed from the thicket. The Spaniard was at their head, and he hurled himself headlong upon the terrified lancers. Falconer said that in all the cavalry work his life had

shown him he had seen no affair to surpass that ambuscade upon the mountain road to Torla. A very regiment of devils came out of the silent forest; they swept on irresistibly; they cut down the cowering lancers; they drove them like sheep into the copse. On, and again on, even to the gate of Torla, everywhere killing, killing—a very lust of slaughter and a harvest of vengeance.

But when the wood was hushed again, the dawn light winging grey over the valley fell upon the body of Colonel Florentin swinging from the tree at the cross-roads.

CHAPTER XV

À LA GUERRE COMME À LA GUERRE

THE company of lancers existed no more! Torla was a hamlet of wailing women and men in their agony. Prudence no longer kept the hussars to the woods; they crossed the valley at a canter.

"It will be a lesson for all Arragon," said the Major, turning from the scene reluctantly. "If we were to give the signal to-day, the province would rise. But we wait for Biscay, since Arragon will not win us Spain. When Biscay is ready, we shall have two provinces with us, and the rest will be easy. In three months' time the Prince will rule from the palace at Madrid."

Falconer could not restrain a smile at his optimism.

"And the Government will wait for you to do all these things?" he suggested. "They will forget that which we have just seen? they will send no other regiments here? there will be no pursuit?"

The Major lighted another cigarette. His air had become dogmatic again.

"They will send more troops, certainly," he said. "Ten thousand, twenty thousand, perhaps. But when they come we shall not be in Spain, *mon ami*."

"But they will be here to-morrow—the next day?"

"If we had not cut the telegraph wires, Captain, it would be as you say. But the wires being cut, a week will not bring other troops to the mountains."

"And meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile we go to our homes. For myself, I shall spend a month in Vienna, for I am an Austrian."

"Yes, but the chief; is not his home at Torla?"

He laughed again. The Englishman was, in his eyes, as a lad at a lesson.

"The Prince has no home. He is a man of all cities. You think that you are a thousand miles from him, and he walks in the streets before you. You cross continents, he has crossed them with you. There is no hour of your life which you can hide from him. Oh, *amigo*, it will require many regiments to hunt down Lorenzo of Torla."

"But there must be a hiding-place for his men. The troops we saw yonder, where are they now?"

"Going to their beds, as we are. Is it so very difficult to understand? Suppose there are a hundred houses in Arragon, each one of which will shelter a trooper and his horse for the sake of Spain, would it be difficult then to conceal our friends? Certainly you do not know the Prince."

"The peasants, at any rate, seem to know him, Major."

"They idolize him because he comes to them from the dead Philip of Gavarnie. Biscay and the men of mountains wait always for a King to come. The very soldiers in the hills wish us success in their hearts. The police help us wherever they can. We have the first, the indispensable weapon of success, Captain—the friendship of the people."

Falconer did not seek to argue with him, or tell him that his idol was no more than a glorified bandit: a bandit who commanded a regiment which any cavalry-

man might have envied; a bandit who dressed up his desperadoes in white and gold, that they might awe the simple men of Arragon; yet, in practice and reality, no better than any cut-throat of Corsica. He would learn that lesson soon enough. A week, a month hence, he and his fellows might be in the prisons of the very capital they sought to rule. What would it avail a prisoner there to plead his nationality? Falconer knew that it would avail him nothing. He saw that, on the day the Spaniards hanged Lorenzo, he himself might not be living to hear the news. For if the leader of the rebels went to his death, how could those who had abetted him escape? He knew that the hope was a folly.

"Well," said he, when at last they emerged from the wood, and saw the ruined castle standing up clear in the light of the rising sun, "we have enthusiasm, at least, Major, and enthusiasm has won many a cause. If it also paid the bill, our master might not complain."

"The rich men of the world will pay the bill, Captain. Do you suppose that we burnt the house of the Count of Vio for nothing last night? There are no such jewels in Spain as those his dead wife wore. They lie in the Prince's treasury to-day."

He laughed gaily at the thought, and waved his companion a merry adieu.

"You cannot lose your road now," he said; "go straight up to the house and to your bed. You will find old Damien waiting for you."

He rode away singing through the woods, but Falconer hastened to the house of ruins, for fatigue lay heavy upon him. At the gate of the castle he found the old servant, and seeing nothing of the Prince, or of

Ximeno, he went straight to his bedroom. All the valley shone with the glory of the morning then; the woods were alive with the music of the birds; a loom of smoke hovered above many a woodlander's cottage. There was nothing to tell of the tragedy played last night down there at the cross-roads.

But when he threw himself upon his bed, sleep was slow to be won, for he thought that he heard the tramp of lancers upon the mountain road; and he said that he might awake to find himself a prisoner in the hands of those men whose comrades lay dead in the glade above Torla.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RIFT

HE awoke in the afternoon of the day, to learn that the Spaniard had not returned to the house. When he had breakfasted alone and had been assured by the old servant that his master would come back "to-morrow," he went a little way down the mountain toward the woods, wherein he had first seen Lorenzo. And there he met no other than Giralda, the little gipsy girl who had been his guide through the hills. She was running across the sward to meet him when first he saw her, and she panted for her breath like a hunted thing. But her dress was still the Gitano's finery she had worn at Zaragoza; and so well did she carry it that he forgot the masquerade, and thought of her only as his little gipsy friend who had wished him so to speak of her.

"Giralda," said he, taking both her hands, "there is no one in Spain I wished so much to see."

"Thank you, Excellency," she answered with mock shyness, but she did not withdraw her hands from his, and it was plain that she shared his pleasure. "I have been looking for you since the dawn."

She dwelt upon the word "excellency" as one who would say, "we play the part again." But she permitted him to lead her to a shaded place of the glade, and there they sat very close together, glad as friends that meet in a strange country.

"You were awake at dawn, Giralda," he said, as she curled herself up on the grass and begged a *segaretto* of him; "then you know what your friends have done down yonder?"

She lighted her cigarette, and blew clouds of smoke to linger about the tawdry stars which gave ornament to her silky auburn hair.

"I saw it all," she said. "I was in the woods when you burned the house of Count Vio—I saw the others ride through Torla. *Madre de Dios*—it was a night of my life."

He did not know how to answer such enthusiasm. In all Spain Lorenzo had not a more devoted servant than this little mystery who masqueraded in the woods below his house.

"Yes," she continued, turning to him with eyes which spoke of gratitude, "I saw you ride to the ambuscade and I was glad, my English friend. You are one of us now and know all."

"If to know all is to be set with your back against a rock while ten fools point guns at you which they do not mean to fire—then I am entirely a disciple, Giralda."

She laughed at him as though it were a great jest.

"All who come to the service must answer so," she said; "we do not want cowards at Torla—they will not win a kingdom for the Prince. But you, he has no better friend than you."

He shrugged his shoulders, for she was not one to whom you could tell a lie.

"I am a friend in so far that his secrets will be safe in my keeping. I am a friend since henceforth I must share his risks. But that I think about him as you do, Giralda, no, I cannot say that."

She was not angry at his answer ; indeed, her pretty affectation of mature wisdom amused him.

"The day will come for that, Captain," said she ; "a month, a year hence, you will think as I do. It is impossible to be near Lorenzo and not to think so. There is not a man who serves him that would not leap down from yonder rock if the Prince asked it of him. And he is worthy of the sacrifice—he is worthy of the love of all his children."

It was a child's declaration ; yet he read her secret in the words—a secret which he had suspected since first she made mention of the Spaniard on the road to the mountains. Whatever might be her girlish awe of this man who had set himself the task of conquering Spain, her love of him was greater. He read it on her lips when they shaped his name ; in her eyes when she spoke of him. And he could not forget that while she loved him, another, who was to be his wife, wanted news of him in England.

"Tell 'me," he said suddenly, for the impulse to speak of the thing was not to be resisted, "you know Isabella de Gavarnie well ?"

Her face flushed crimson at his question. She turned away her eyes and began to gaze wistfully at the mighty wall of mountains which divides Spain from France.

"She is my friend," was her simple answer.

"And she is the friend of Lorenzo ?"

"She will be his wife on the first day of the New Year."

"You think that she wishes that ?"

"She does not wish it—she is not a woman who loves as other women. It was her father's dying word that she should marry the man who will save Spain.

We Spaniards do not forget such a command as that."

"But the Prince himself—is he not in love with her?"

She began to pluck up roots of the grass. He could see that she breathed quickly and suffered much at his talk, yet for her sake he pursued it.

"It is not for me to speak of the Prince," she said reluctantly; "he comes to save Spain, and he must neglect no instrument."

"You consider Madame Gavarnie an instrument, then?"

"She is an instrument, because she is rich. All these hills—they are hers. Cross the mountains into France and you may pass for miles through lands which her fathers won and kept. Her name is great in three kingdoms. She has what the Prince has not—a great nobility, the traditions of a noble family. When she declares for Lorenzo the cities of the North will hesitate no more. She will make him a king, as he will make her a queen. It is for that he remembers her father's oath."

For an instant the fervour of the hope animated her talk; then she fell again to silence, and he saw that tears filled her eyes.

"Tell me," said he, "how comes it, if Madame Gavarnie has no love for your Prince, that she will consent to marry him?"

"She will marry him to win a kingdom, señor. Do you think that none but men can sacrifice for ambition's sake? In all your own England there is no more ambitious woman than Isabella de Gavarnie. If she were sure, as I am sure, she would be his wife to-

morrow. But she is not sure, and so she sends you to Spain that you may tell her the truth."

He looked at her in astonishment. That she had guessed the purport of his journey was a thing he had never dreamed.

"Well," said he, when he had thought of it a moment, "if Madame Gavarnie were less sure when I return to England, would you be glad, Giralda?"

He could see her eyes sparkling.

"I cannot speak of it," she said quickly. "Yet if it should be for the Prince's sake!"

The smile which crossed Falconer's lips was hidden from her.

"You think it would help him if there were no marriage at the New Year?" he asked.

"It would save his life, señor," she exclaimed excitedly.

"His life?"

She put her hand upon his. It was as hot as the hand of one in a fever.

"Captain Falconer," she said quickly, and this time in her pretty English, "you know that Madame Isabella has a brother?"

It was a strange question, for as she put it that memorable scene in the gloomy house in Bayswater came back vividly to his mind. The man who lay in a trance upon the stairs when he had gone with Isabella to her home—had she not spoken of him as her brother?

"Well," said he, "and what of this man, Giralda?"

"It is he who will betray the Prince to those who hunt him in the mountains."

He suppressed an exclamation. The key to the house of mysteries seemed to lie in his hands.

"Come," said he, for the thing was difficult to believe, "you jest, *petite*. What kind of man is that who can betray Lorenzo?"

"The man who knows Lorenzo's secret, my English friend."

"But we all know his secret. Are we not all part of it? If he can defy the Spanish Government, why should he fear this man, the brother of the woman he is to marry?"

She clasped her hands about her knees, and began to rock herself to and fro as one who wars with a great trouble.

"*Madre de Dios*," she exclaimed presently, "how can you understand these things, you who are a stranger to Arragon? For me they are part of my life. I was brought up with the name of Gavarnie on my lips. I heard it every day; every day the people said: 'Philip, our lord, will come back.' When Philip died in France, at his château near Toulouse, we spoke of the new Count, Sebastian, and waited for him. Then the news came that Sebastian was a traitor, who looked for his future at Madrid. But Philip did not forget us. His last word was of Lorenzo, who was to take Sebastian's place. That is why the master is great in Arragon to-day; great, because of Philip who sent a prince to us; great, because of his own courage and love and power to win the hearts of men. For that the Count of Gavarnie will betray him."

She spoke as one who is sure of a thing; a little wise head gazing with a dreamer's eyes over the woods of the Arragon she loved. Falconer found in her words a clearer knowledge of Lorenzo and his past than in all the talk of those who served him. The

mystery of the gloomy house in Bayswater was a mystery no longer. He was sure that he had seen Sebastian de Gavarnie there, lying in a trance of sleep upon the stairs. And the man with whom he had quarrelled, who was that if not Lorenzo himself?

"Tell me," he asked, when some minutes of silence had passed, "does not the Prince know all this? Is he not prepared for anything Sebastian may do?"

She shook her pretty head sadly.

"He will not think of it; he will not doubt his friends. And Sebastian is still one of us in name. If fortune gives us victory, he will be here to share it; if we fall, he will be the first at Madrid with the news."

"But why does he not make sure of it and tell the whole story to the Government, to-day if you like?"

"Because he is a coward. He dare not speak; he has wished it many times, but his courage fails him."

"Will it not fail him to the end?"

"*Sabe Dios*—who can tell? The will of such a man blows hot and cold as the breezes of May. He has nothing to profit by our fall at present. It will be otherwise when Isabella is the wife of the man he fears. And she will be his wife when the year is done."

"You think that Sebastian does not wish this marriage?"

"How could he wish it, señor? Is not Gavarnie the greatest name in Arragon? Would he see it linked with the name of one he has called an adventurer? Does the smith take nails of brass for a golden casket? *Ojala*, he will wish it when the stars fall, when the sun shines at midnight."

"And you wish it even less, Giralda?"

She bowed her head. Her great love for the man was as pretty as the lips which spoke of him.

"Who am I to wish it?" she asked plaintively.

"One who loves him," Falconer whispered.

She did not answer him, nor pretend that it was not so.

"And one who has found a friend," he continued.

She laid her little hand upon his arm again.

"*Amigo*," she said earnestly, "we speak of dangerous things. Let us forget them."

"Why, then, should they be dangerous, Giralda?"

"Because the Prince can read the hearts of men as others read books."

"And if he can?"

"He will kill you!"

The childish drama of her threat was a thing to see. He would have argued with her, but, while yet she spoke, her quick ear detected some sound in the forest, of which he was unconscious, and she sprang to her feet and listened long, as one trained to the woodlander's life.

"Well," he asked, "and what do you hear?"

"I hear horses in the glen."

"The Prince returns, then?"

"He rides with Ximeno."

"I shall go to meet him. We will keep our secrets, Giralda, and they will be a bond between us."

"If you are my friend, they will never pass your lips," she cried quickly. "God guard you and her you love."

Upon this she was gone like some elfe of the thicket, running swiftly from his view until the heart of the thicket hid her. But he went down the path toward the glen wondering not so much at the mystery of the child's life as at her words, "God guard you and her whom you love."

CHAPTER XVII

FALCONER HEARS OF A JOURNEY

AT dinner that night, Lorenzo spoke both of the events of the preceding day and of his own plans for the future.

"Captain," he said, as he leaned back in his chair and began to sip his coffee, "you know that there will be five thousand troops at Torla before sunset to-morrow?"

"I was expecting to hear it."

"And you ask where we shall be?"

"Not at all; it is not my business."

"But you have your ideas?"

"They are vague. You will not be caught like a rat in a trap, of course."

He laughed softly.

"When the troops come here to-morrow," he said, "the spires of Toulouse will be our horizon."

"Of Toulouse!"

"As I say, of Toulouse. The hour has come when Europe must know that I am not a brigand."

He passed a French paper across the table. It was the *Figaro*, and Falconer read therein an article which spoke of an outbreak of brigandage in the Pyrenees. The writer added that the Spanish Government attached no political importance to that which was the work of a few desperadoes, and that sufficient

troops to quell the disturbance were already despatched to the mountains.

"You see," continued Lorenzo, "I am not yet 'the enemy.' But I can wait, Captain. My friends at Madrid—they should be in a hurry."

"But you quit Torla."

"For the moment, yes. When the soldiers come here to-morrow, it will be to shoot the stones of my house. Next year I shall build a new house so strong all the armies of Spain shall not cast it down. You think that would be a miracle, Captain?"

"I have not thought about it at all."

"But you must think about it, as others think. Does not Spain ask a miracle of me?"

He spoke vaguely; and passed a second paper, one written in Spanish. In spite of Falconer's poor knowledge of the tongue, he read therein a thing which was more wonderful than any story he had yet heard in the mountains. For it was a paragraph which stated that the notorious brigand of Arragon, Lorenzo de la Cruz, was seen on the Prado at Madrid on the very day the Englishman had come to Torla.

"Well," asked Lorenzo, "you are surprised, Captain?"

"Not at all; I am curious, Prince."

He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"You English have no imagination," he said curtly; "but imagination rules in Arragon. I am not as other men, the people say. I am in Madrid at twelve o'clock; when one o'clock strikes upon their bells I am in the mountains. They ask a miracle and a miracle is given to them. What is that to you and I who are soldiers and believe no longer in miracles?"

His meaning was very plain. "For the people, a

miracle; for you, the sword." And this was the substance of his talk when they went into the library together, and he began to question his guest concerning the English cavalry and all that was known in England of the cavalry attack. For two hours he examined him closely. No lecturer ever had a pupil more apt. He was as curious as a child gleaning facts from a picture book. He had the mind to grapple with obscurities and to make simplicities of them. If he was no soldier then, if his ideas were crude, and ill-ordered, and out of date, Falconer said that he would be a master of war before the month was out. In all his life he had never met one so gifted in all those qualities which make historic generals.

They talked of the war game until the clock in the library struck eleven; but when the bells in the valley began to chime the hour, the Spaniard rose abruptly and bade his tutor prepare for the march.

"It is time for us to be out of Torla, Captain," said he; "to-morrow night we shall put some of these theories of yours to practice, and if they do not fail us, we shall be the richer by £500,000 when forty hours are passed."

"You go to the north then, Prince?"

"I go to write my name in France."

Had he said, "I go that Rome may fall," it could not have been a finer boast.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WOODED HEIGHTS OF LANGUEDOC

IT was the word of the hunchback, Ximeno, that the dress for the journey should be the plain riding dress of a Spanish gentleman, in which Falconer had come to Torla.

"Our way lies to France, Excellency," he said; "if we have friends at the gate, we have enemies also. It is necessary to cross the frontier at a place where no eye will see us. When that is done, we shall be in the saddle again, and luck will go with us."

"And if luck does not go with us?"

"There will be a guillotine at Toulouse, and heads will fall into the basket."

He ceased to laugh, and sighed as one who had some love of life left. This hunchback, at any rate, knew well the madness of the venture to which his master had set his hand. And he did not fail to stimulate curiosity.

"Come, why should there be a guillotine at Toulouse, Ximeno?" asked Falconer.

"To punish those who are about to stop the mail to Narbonne and to rob it of £500,000, Captain."

Falconer had guessed that some dangerous emprise carried them from the mountains; but this answer to his question stupefied him. That he had become, by some freak of his destiny, the comrade of the most

dangerous man in Europe, he knew full well. The rest he could but hazard; and his head was still full of it when the Spaniard came up and they left the house together.

It wanted a quarter to the hour of midnight at that time. Red lanterns were swinging in the valley. Their way lay to the cavern of the torrent which had been the Englishman's prison when first he came to Torla. A man stood at the gate, and by the rocking light of a crazy lantern he guided them to the cascade, and to a place where the shelving wall of rock, above which the water poured, had been tunnelled adroitly. The mystery of Lorenzo's retreat was a mystery no more. The spray of the foaming waters fended the tunnel's mouth as no door of iron could have done. The three men, with cloaks drawn well about their ears, and the lantern's light dancing upon the silvered torrent, passed through the aperture silently and gained the cave beyond it. The road to France lay before them; the road to that city wherefrom Europe should hear of the desperadoes which Arragon had given to Spain.

Beyond the torrent the path lay through a low tunnel of the rock, which they followed for a great way—a weary, darksome journey—until they emerged at last in a vast natural hall, in such a cavern as is to be found nowhere but in the Pyrenees. Two hundred paces long, and the half of that in breadth, it was plain that here was the barracks which Nature had built for Lorenzo and his men: here their stronghold against the armies of the world. Open above in many a place to the cool breezes of the hills; furnished with stalls and boxes for the horses; equipped with ample provisions against a siege, this mighty haven

was in all things such as a dreamer would have sought in the hours of his dreams. Well, indeed, had Lorenzo said that the armies of Spain should not hunt him from his home; that the hand of God was over him in the mountains he had learnt to rule.

Midnight had long passed before this pilgrimage of the hills drew to its close. In and out, at dizzy altitudes, a silent company hastening silently, they had no eyes for the splendour of the path, no ears for the music of the night. Yet there were many beauties by the way, and some of those who followed the path must have carried a memory of that hour which carried them by a silent lake entombed in a vast cavern, a very pool of death. Bewitchingly still in a vast hall of the mountain's heart, showing in the shallow of its waters a thousand glories of jasper and quartz and marble, it was as some river of the nether world—a place of spirits and of souls unresting. But the Spaniards passed it without remark; and when they had gone on, perhaps a mile beyond, they entered yet another tunnel of the cliffs, and, passing thence, could look down upon the fair valleys and the wooded heights of Languedoc.

"La belle France, la belle France," cried many a tongue as the troopers pushed forward to feast their eyes upon that woodland scene.

But Falconer said nothing.

That puny company, now emerging from the woods, would it pit itself against the mighty armies of the Republic?

Oh! folly of the dreams. Oh! fatuity which had made of this adventurer such a king of men!

CHAPTER XIX

AS A MAN UPON A WIRE

THE last of the tunnels had carried the company out to the summit of a precipice. There were steps cut in the face of the rocky cliff, and when the men had gone down, at the hazard of their necks, they stood in a clump of pines and heard the whinnying of horses. Anon, horsemen emerged from the shadows, and began to fall in by troops—a black-cloaked group wearing kepis in lieu of helmets and numbering, for Falconer counted them, one hundred and fifty in all. His own horse was brought to him by the groom he had seen at Torla, and no sooner was he mounted than the command to march was given, and he found himself riding side by side with Ximeno, downward through the wood to the distant city.

“Well,” said he, “so we are in France at last, Ximeno.”

The hunchback put his fingers to his lips warningly. No monkey mounted in mockery upon a horse could have cut such a sorry figure as this poor lad who dreamed of troopers at the gallop.

“Hush! hush! Excellency,” he whispered, “we are no longer in Spain, and the trees have ears.”

“As they will have eyes at dawn, Ximeno, and then——”

He answered with a gesture, as who should say, It

is not my affair. Falconer saw that they had given him a sword and that he had his hand upon the hilt of it. His wish to ride as the rest of them was not to be concealed, yet a pitiful thing to see.

"The Prince has thought of it," he said presently. "Be sure of that, Captain; he does not walk with a fool's bandage on his eyes."

"And he believes that we can ride through France without observation."

"He knows that we cannot. When observation comes, he will wish it."

"You speak riddles, my friend. Will there not be daylight in a couple of hours?"

"Exactly; and in a couple of hours we shall all be sleeping in the château of Saint Cyr."

He hunched himself up contentedly, as though that was his final word upon it; but Falconer pursued the subject. His amazement at the Spaniard's organization was ever growing.

"Saint Cyr!" he exclaimed, "was he not the lieutenant who was kept in the woods when we burnt the house of Vio?"

"No other."

"And he has a château near here?"

"The finest in the south. That was a bad day for France when they would not give Saint Cyr a commission in their chasseurs. It is too late now. We have no better friend, Captain; no finer shelter than his house. We shall be within its gates before the woodlanders are awake in the forest."

Falconer was silent a little while in new astonishment.

"Ximeno," he said at last, "do you not think the Prince a genius?"

The hunchback turned his bent head and showed a pair of cunning little eyes.

"Oh, have I not said it?—it is not my business to think. I am the servant, Captain, and when I take my holiday it is to go out and see a man walking upon a tight-wire. Some day he will fall. I would not wish to have a holiday that day."

"But we are to have no fall to-night."

"*Sabe Dios*—we are going to ride through a city which has five thousand troops within its walls. We are going to stop the mail to Narbonne and rob it of £500,000 which the Rothschilds send to Nice. Is not the wire very high, Captain? God send that we are alive to-morrow to tell the story."

It was on Falconer's lips to answer that the wire was very high indeed, but they emerged from the sheltering woods at the moment, and there before them, lying snug on the heights above the beautiful river Garonne, was the house of which the hunchback had spoken—the château of the young Frenchman, Saint Cyr, who, rejected by the country he would have served, had put his life and his fortune into the hands of the Spaniard. Troopers were already about the door; and in the first flush of the morning light, Falconer thought to discern the figure of Lorenzo with old Jussuf at his side. But no light shone from the windows of the château; no dogs barked when the troops rode up. Silently they passed the gates; silently they were received beyond them. And so they made acquaintance of one of those many homes which, as Lorenzo had declared, served the rebel army in all the countries of Europe.

It was a stately house—a landmark of the ages. You could have tethered the horses of a regiment in

its stables, for kings had made a home of it. So vast was the natural park in which it stood, that a man might gallop through it for half an hour, yet find no boundary. And just as its magnificence was not to be disputed, so was the extravagance of the reception accorded to the men. No sooner had they looked after their horses, than servants led them to the great banquetting hall, where they found others of their comrades sitting to a feast which might have come from Joseph's or the house of Voisin.

Dim though the lights were, hushed as the voices—lest any stranger passing through the park might hear them—nevertheless, it was an assembly to appeal to memory and to leave it waking. Austrians, Roumanians, Germans, Frenchmen; but, outnumbering these, the Spaniards—all the desperadoes of Europe seemed to be gathered at that board. No word could describe the power of that scene, as the wan light fell upon those resolute faces, and, in the silence of that vast hall, Lorenzo gave the toast “Nosostros”—the outcasts of Europe, the dreamers who would conquer the world. No word could describe that moment when the company sprang to its feet, and the flush of dawn was upon the painted windows, and swords were raised high, and, crossing them, the White Hussars heard the master's voice proclaiming that he would make them the children of kings.

They had prepared hammocks for the rank and file in many of the disused and forgotten chambers of the château; but for the officers there were apartments of great magnificence, and canopied beds, and the luxury of palaces. To these they went silently, so that when day broke, and Falconer opened his window and looked out over the park of the château,

the great house was as a garden of sleep, without life or the token of life. Nor was there any sound or sign of movement until the lights were twinkling in the villages again.

At ten o'clock that night, when they had supped and their horses were all ready, they rode again, two by two, from the park, and striking to the north-east, they left the security of the woods and emerged boldly upon the great plain which girdles the city of Toulouse.

"God send that we are alive to-morrow to tell the tale," had been the hunchback's prayer.

Falconer looked at the strange troop about him, when the woods no longer gave their shelter, and that prayer was upon his lips.

Who would tell the tale? Who, among them, would see the sun of dawn again?

CHAPTER XX

A GOLD WAGON

THERE is a great high road of rail, running from the city of Toulouse to the town of Marseilles, and thereafter to Nice and Genoa. Striking, at the first, across the great plain about Toulouse, the line trends toward the sea, and is so laid that it links together all the greater coastal towns of the Mediterranean. Falconer had imagined, so soon as the hunchback spoke, that this line was the object of the Spaniards' attack; and he remembered that bullion passed frequently from the banks of Toulouse to the seaports of the remoter south. Had such a railway been in Spain, he would not have marvelled that any one proposed a venture upon it; but in France, in the country where all are soldiers, where the first report of their coming would bring a hundred thousand upon them, what madman's notion was it which carried them there, he asked? Would not the alarm be spread from the very first village they passed by? Would not the first gendarme they met send news of them to the city? He knew that it must be so. He knew that they were adventurers, indeed; that a miracle alone could give his comrades another day of liberty, if not of life.

It had been ten o'clock when they left the château of Saint Cyr; it was half-past eleven when they first sighted the red light upon the railway of Narbonne.

The country through which the men rode was desolate and bare of villages. They avoided the highways, but kept to the grass of the fields; and so, though none looked upon it, gave a display of horsemanship which no regiment in Europe could have surpassed. Grimly, silently, clothed from head to foot in black, with outposts and flanking squadrons, they pressed on, sparing their horses for the greater work to come, arousing none from his sleep, scarce sighting a house until the little station came in view, and they saw the railway before them. Then, at some signal Falconer could not distinguish, the troop halted without warning, and he heard Lorenzo calling for Yoli.

"Lieutenant," said the Spaniard, "take a file with you and cut the wires to the north. Saint Cyr, you will post yourself with a half section upon the hill above the village; Major Georges, we leave it to you to deal with the man in that signal-box. Gaster will hold the station with twenty men. For the others—the train. Where is Captain Arriza?"

A thick-set Spaniard, burly and good-humoured, drove his horse to the front and saluted.

"Here, Prince."

"The gold wagon is the third from the end of the train, Captain. We leave it to you, the best shot we have, to settle with those who will defend it. Do not take life where you can give it. Let the bullion be distributed without loss of time. The Duke of Verdun waits beyond Foix with our own carriages. Ride there when the work is done, as your written instructions tell you."

The Spaniard turned and cantered away towards the station.

The next name Lorenzo uttered was the Englishman's.

"Captain," he said, "the wires are cut for ten miles. You think that is sufficient?"

"The nearest troops, Prince—where are they?"

"There is a regiment at Narbonne, which is sixty-five miles from this place."

"And Toulouse?"

"A mounted messenger will ride your ten miles in fifty minutes. The alarm will be in Toulouse in fifty-one. Is that grace enough?"

Lorenzo pooh-poohed the suggestion a little contemptuously.

"Where will they find their mounted messenger? There are but five horses in the village, and none of those will live in five minutes' time."

"Which means that you have more than two hours, Prince."

"As you say. We shall carry the news to Toulouse ourselves. For the rest we have posted piquets and standing patrols on the lines of approach. Have you any other plan to suggest, Captain?"

"Only that the village be held at either end, and that flanking patrols keep the people to their houses."

"I had not thought of it. Let Vathos see to that. The others"—here he raised his voice—"let it be your business, men, to see that none come out of the station alive. Give life where you can. Use the sword when it will serve. The captains of companies have their instructions written for them. Carry them out, as you value your necks."

He saluted the officers, and, turning, bade Falconer follow him while he rode toward the line. It was then about a quarter to twelve o'clock. A scud of cloud

intermittently curtained the moon; but when it passed the steel rails could be seen running as silver threads across the plain, and upon their right hand the houses of a hamlet, small even for the hamlets of Languedoc. In the signal-box a bright light was burning, but anon it went out, and when it appeared again with diminished lustre, the troop knew that Major Georges had dealt with the signalman.

Lorenzo drew rein upon a grassy knoll fifty yards from the station. Save for the Englishman, Jussuf was his only companion. His usual reticence no longer distinguished him. He talked freely of the night's work; yet could forget it to pass his cigar-case to his friend, and to speak of the cigars therein. It was plain that he imagined himself some new general of armies conducting a campaign momentous for the nations. That he was engaged upon a business worthy of a common robber was a suggestion he would have resented at the sword's point. Yet a robber the world has called him; as such he has been written down in the history of Spain.

"Captain," he asked, when the other had lighted his cigar, "do you think that the troops are well placed?"

Falconer looked about him critically; but the cloud was upon the moon again, and he could not make out so much as one man in the vicinity of the station. The village continued to sleep. A dog barked and was instantly silenced.

"There is one dog which will not bark to-morrow," said Jussuf grimly.

"I am waiting for the Captain's opinion," cried Lorenzo.

"Well," said Falconer, "if you would strike unseen, your men are very well placed."

The compliment pleased him. He sat like a statue—a burly figure upon a horse which kings would have envied.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "I would strike unseen. The cities must not know whence the blow comes."

Jussuf, matter of fact as ever, was in no mood for heroics.

"It is ten minutes to twelve, Prince," he said.

"Well?" asked Lorenzo.

"The mail has left the junction and is signalled here."

"You are sure that Major Georges is a good signal-man, Jussuf?"

"He spent three hours in that very box last week. It cost us forty francs to the man. We were young engineers taking our holiday at Villefranche, and the signal interested us. *Bon Dieu!* if they have left the fellow alive he will have something to think about."

Lorenzo shaded his eyes and began to gaze down the line.

"Do you hear anything, Captain?" he asked.

"I hear the hum of wheels, Prince."

"*Bueno!* it is the mail."

He said it as coolly as another man would have said, "Here is the milk." Of the three in that place, he alone was entirely master of himself, he alone continued to smoke contentedly. As for Falconer, his cigar had gone out at the first, and he dropped it from his fingers when he saw the head-lights of the advancing mail. Even then he did not wholly believe that the tragedy would happen. Before his eyes was the wooded plain of Languedoc; a village slept in a zareba of trees; a little station showed red lights at

its signals; black figures moved upon its platform. Could it be that some of those now seeking the fitful sleep of travel in that distant train would sleep for ever at the dawn? Would the station ring with the oaths of men and the crack of pistols presently? Imagination, slow to be awakened, answered, "No"; the silent figures standing by said, "Yes."

The mail was travelling at a speed of forty miles an hour, he judged. As the thunder of the humming wheels magnified, her discordant whistle was added to the roar of the approach. Once, twice, thrice the blast rang out; then sparks shot from the rails. The door of the fire-box was opened, and a great glow of crimson light showed him the driver at his post and the fireman stoking. Her speed cleverly diminishing, the engine entered the little station at the pace of a horse walking. There had been no moment since Falconer came to Spain when his nerves were so played upon or his mind so fired at a spectacle.

There was the train before him. He could see men start up from their seats; could see the doors open in the corridors of the sleeping-cars, and heads thrust forth; could read almost the question, "What stops us?" upon the driver's face. And even while he looked the little station became a hive of life and of activity. The quiet word of question turned to a shriek of panic; the driver of the train was held trembling at his post; the fireman fell headlong from the foot-plate; women's voices in pitiful entreaty were joined to the uproar; black shapes swarmed over the lines; the crack of pistol shots was heard above the terror of the night. Out of the very darkness the blow had come. The silent earth seemed to have opened that the ghostly figures might come forth.

A scene to stir the heart, indeed, yet one not lacking its comedy or its moments of human nature. It was odd to hear the laughter of a man in the forepart of the mail, who cried out that he had sent his luggage on before him, and repeated the fact again and again hysterically, while he shook his fist in the faces of those who passed through the cars and called them robbers. He was a Frenchman, and his demeanour was in striking contrast to that of three little English girls, who stood in pretty sleeping-gowns at the windows of their car, and laughed as heartily as though a clown fooled for their delight.

Pretty as this spectacle of the children was, Falconer soon forgot it. Another scene, weird, engrossing, drew him from his place upon the knoll, down to the very bank of the line. It was the scene about the gold wagon which had called the White Hussars from Spain to this place of peril. Faithful to his instructions, Captain Arriza, the good-humoured Spaniard, had taken half a dozen of the best men in the regiment with him, and surrounded the wagon almost before the train was drawn to a standstill. That he might not make any mistake, or go upon a fool's quest, those who had sent the carriage from Toulouse had written the words "Gold Wagon" upon it in three languages. And so sure were they of the vigilance of the railway people, that they had left the defence of five hundred thousand pounds' worth of French gold to three bank-clerks, armed with revolvers and with boyish enthusiasm. These lads sprang upon the steps of the car and flourished their puny pistols in the air. With oaths and ridiculous threats they bade the Spaniard stand back at the peril of his life.

"Back ! back !" cried the first of them ; "do you not see that I have a pistol, Monsieur ?"

"*Je ne bouge jamais !*" roared a second, waving his pistol dramatically in the air.

Arriza continued to smile placidly.

"Gentlemen," said he, "whether you move or whether you stay, is for you to decide. But I warn you, that if you do not open the doors of that car in one minute, I will blow out your brains."

They answered him with a howl, as much of fear as of anger.

"*Jamais ! Jamais !*" cried one incessantly ; "I defend my honour, Monsieur."

"You have defended it like a brave man," was the Spaniard's answer.

"You shall pass over our bodies," wailed the lad ; but his fellow, braver and more silent, covered the Captain with his pistol.

"Sir," he said, "I am going to fire."

Arriza took off his cap and bent low in the saddle—a mocking gesture. In the same instant a revolver flashed in the darkness, and the clerk rolled, in sheer terror, down the steps of the wagon.

"Gentlemen," said Arriza to the two who remained, "your honour is justified. I implore you to come down, for the minute is up."

They looked at him, but did not reply. The shorter of the two had begun to chatter like an ape. Presently he threw down his pistol and went running over the fields. Fear had mastered him, and he ran for his life, pursued by a trooper, who could scarce sit upon his horse for laughing. As for the other, he fired his pistol blindly in the air, but before he could pull the trigger a second time, some one laid a

hand upon his collar and flung him headlong to the ground.

"Break open the door!" roared Arriza, who smiled no more. The fever of the gold quest was now upon him. Falconer could see his greedy eyes watching every ringing blow aimed at the lock of the wagon. When the door burst, and the bullion chests were dragged out, he rocked in his saddle as a man drunk with wine.

"Off with the lids!" he cried ferociously. "*Dépêchez-vous!* Would you have the day see it?"

They had brought torches for the work, and the unsteady glare of these now played upon the faces of men hardened in the passions of greed. Those who witnessed the scene carried a vivid remembrance of the half-suppressed cries when the lids of the chests were forced off, and the shining metal—much of it in ingots, a little of it in twenty-franc pieces—was spread abroad before the eyes of the adventurers. Passed through those trembling hands as through sieves, the glittering coins caught the rays of the light and reflected them in dazzling gems of fire. The very magnificence of the treasure put a spell upon those who had captured it. They stood irresolute, blinded by the glitter of their booty. Their words of wonder were like the words of children.

"Each man will fill his haversack," said their leader quietly. "Let none carry more than he can gallop with. Advance by files—halt!"

One by one the men advanced to the wagon and began to fill stout canvas bags with the ingots and the gold-pieces. Other squads were summoned from the train, until some sixty men in all had distributed the plunder and were mounted upon their horses. That

a careful plan was being pursued Falconer could not doubt. No sooner had a man filled his bag than he mounted his horse and rode off a little way across the meadow to a place appointed. When all were there, the word to march was given, and those whose haversacks were full cantered away into the darkness. As for the rest, they still held the approaches to the station and the hamlet beyond it. Even above the clamour there had been heard the fitful sound of gunshots in the village, and many a peasant awoke from his sleep to tell himself that the phantom horsemen, of which the legends spoke, were at last at his door. But the hour for prudence was passed. A regiment of chasseurs alone could have maimed the work. The White Hussars were masters of the night; they cared not though all Languedoc should come out to see them at the work.

For nearly half an hour after the departure of those who carried the gold the rest remained upon the railway. Then a bugle blast sounded the assembly, and, forming up once more, they had the word to march. In silence they had come, in silence they rode away. There was still a light in the signal-box; steam still poured from the hissing locomotive; groups of passengers were gathered upon the platform to discuss the thing in awed whispers; the little English girls were at the windows of their carriage. But these were quickly forgotten. Success was as wine in the veins of the troopers; they doffed their *kepis* and cried again and again, "Long live the Prince!"

Lorenzo answered them as a general might have answered troops in the first moments of a bloody victory.

"God has given us the night," he said. "Stand

with me yet a little longer, and He will give us the day."

They answered him with a ringing cheer.

"Toulouse! Toulouse!" was their cry.

And so they rode onward—to the very gates of that great city of the south.

CHAPTER XXI

TOULOUSE AWAKES

THE night had been fresh for a summer night of Spain. When the White Hussars turned their horses toward Toulouse, there was a heavy vapour of clouds in the sky, and weighty drops of rain began to fall upon their bridle hands. The coming storm compelled every man to silence. They buttoned their cloaks and bent their heads to the driving rain. Their music was a moan of the wind through the telegraph wires above. Every tree, shaping blackly out of the shadows of the night, stood up as a gibbet in their path.

They left the railway station at a gallop, but at the end of the first kilometre the horses were checked and nursed to a gentle trot. The road was a good one, and vastly level, for it struck across the great plain which girds the city. Falconer's place, as heretofore, took him to Lorenzo's side; old Jussuf, the Roumanian, and Major Georges completed the number of that odd staff. From time to time, an unknown officer wearing the uniform of a French regiment of chasseurs rode up to the Spaniard; but Falconer did not remember to have seen him before. Whether the man had ever been in the French cavalry, or whether it were but a disguise, he had no opportunity to ask. That the dress would serve its purpose could not be doubted. No sooner were they in the first village

than the salute of an *agent de police* told him that they might pass at a stretch for a troop of chasseurs abroad upon some business of urgency.

Here again, as in Torla, the foresight of the Spaniard was a thing to marvel at. There was no contingency of that venture for which he had not provided; hardly the movement of a man which had not been dictated by his genius and his capacity for command. No marvel, Falconer said, that these others should so trust him or be the victims of that hallucination which had carried him out of the mountains to this open place of peril. No marvel they should believe, as he never ceased to tell them, that he was a man sent from God. The hand of God, for a truth, seemed to shield him even in the hour of madness and of peril.

An unforgettable ride in truth it was; an hour of mystery and of danger which appealed strangely to the imagination of the soldier. No word was spoken, no command heard, until the spires of Toulouse rose up before the men, and they could see lights flashing and hear the scream of whistles and the note of bells; or look down upon the placid Garonne, lying as a very Styx in the shadow of the storm. They had passed a second village by that time, and, though windows were lifted and heads thrust out, the uniform of the chasseur outpost quieted all alarm, so that even the gendarme at the gate saluted. Thus they came to a little hill upon the road wherefrom they could espy the city very plainly; and here Lorenzo halted them, and called for Yoli, whom he had not seen since he was sent to cut the wires.

The lieutenant had been waiting in the gate of a house some mile beyond the last of the villages. At

the first mention of his name he came out of the shadows and saluted the Prince.

"Is all well, Yoli?"

"It is as you commanded, Prince."

"The wires are cut, here and from Castanet?"

Yoli pointed to a post upon his left hand. A tangle of wire swayed in the wind against the background of the lurid sky.

"It is good," said Lorenzo. "You have nothing to report?"

"No man has ridden by here for forty minutes, Prince. A mounted patrol passed us by Castanet, but he lies in the ditch, where he will not be found until morning."

Lorenzo turned to Jussuf.

"You do not wish for ground scouts, Jussuf?"

"I think it unnecessary, Prince."

"And you, Captain?—you are of that opinion?"

"It depends upon your intention, Prince."

"My intention is to ride through the city, and to leave a message for the people upon the doors of the Hôtel de Ville."

"In that case I am with General Jussuf. If there are troops out at all, you cannot succeed. If there are no troops, the police will not be a danger to you."

"We shall succeed," he said decisively, and so they began to march again.

He had put himself at the head of his men by this time, but we went no longer at a trot. Impatience and excitement burned him as a fever. His hand trembled upon the reins; he lifted his hat often to wipe sweat from his brow. As for the others, they rode in files behind him—a silent enemy creeping silently over the plain of Toulouse. Low upon the

distant horizon was a lurid patch of light hewn out of the canopy of storm. The moaning wind had abated, but a dull patter of rain was heard unceasingly. Railway whistles, sounded afar, were distinctive, and ringing as the heralds of wet. A loom of smoke lay heavy upon the city, and crept over its twinkling lights. The horses cantered restlessly; the raindrops glistened upon their coats.

Falconer judged that they had ridden the twelve miles which lay between the station and the city in an hour and a half. It must have been two o'clock of the morning when they made out the bureau of the *octroi* at a turn of the road before them, and Lorenzo gave a final word to Jussuf.

"You understand, General," he said, a little anxiously, "if the man questions the pass he is to be dealt with."

"I have my pistol ready," was the reply.

"Very well; and after that, silence, on pain of death."

"Each man knows his duty and will do it."

"*Bueno*. As for you, Captain Falconer, you will remain at my side, and when we are through the city, you will follow where I shall lead you."

He did not wait for a salute, but spurred his horse and cantered up to the bureau. An officer came out at once, and, observing that a chasseur led the troop, was all attention and civility. Very far from his mind was the truth, that an adventurer out of Spain had ridden up to the gates with fifty of his fellows, and meant boldly to pass to the city beyond. He had no curiosity which did not concern his bed. If he had been told whence the men came, he would have laughed in the speaker's face and called him a madman.

Three hundred yards, perhaps, from the bureau of the customs the hussars entered the first street of Toulouse. There was an agent of police here, and he, as the others, saluted them, though Falconer thought that he peered into their faces with an over-ripe curiosity. But he said nothing, and they rode on through the deserted street—a street so still that the clatter of horses brought many a man to his window and kindled many a light high under the sheltering eaves. By here and there the bright lamps of a *café* shed a golden circle upon the pavement, so that one could see the grim faces of the men who passed, and wonder at the emotions written there in letters of flesh. Of what did those men think? Falconer asked. Were they telling themselves, as he had done already, that a word whispered in the street would awaken Toulouse as she had never awakened before? Did they say that if any man proclaimed their business, bugles would ring in the barracks, the tramping of squadrons, the clash of accoutrement, the hoarse word of command would be heard? Did the tremendous walls of the prison, by which they passed, open to their vision and show them cells beyond and the scaffold awaiting them?

Reason and reckoning were far from his mind. The glistening wet upon the pavements; the footsteps of laggards going to their beds; the slow and regular beat of the guard; the crooked, high-gabled houses; the dim outline of great churches, even of the stately cathedral, all passed as shadows of sleep. Impulse carried him on, a daring he had never known in all his life gave him courage. One man against France, he said; one man risen up in the world to throw the gauntlet to the nations. How long had he to live? how long?

Until this time he knew nothing of the city of Toulouse. His ignorance of the city forbade him to say by what gate they passed in, or through what streets they marched. But the picture which lingered in his mind was that of silent streets where the wan light of the lamps fell upon the faces of his comrades, and the jangling arms drew the gaze of the curious. Now in mere alleys, now out upon a broad thoroughfare, where many *cafés* still harboured those who sleep with the stars; sometimes in the glare of arc lamps, again in the darkness of the cathedral close, they seemed to pass, as those in a theatre, quickly from the garish day to the quiet and solemnity of eventide. Not once from the gate of the city to the doors of the great Hôtel de Ville itself did a gendarme stop them, or a police agent put a question to the mock chasseur. The driving rain sent all to the warmer places of shelter and comfort. What had the police to do with a squadron of cavalry abroad at the whim of some over-zealous general? No business of theirs, forsooth, no concern of the city they guarded. And so they gave the horsemen a "good-night"; and as they continued, and success came the nearer to them, delight in the venture succeeded to fear of it. Falconer remembered Ximeno's word—"as a man upon a wire." They walked a wire, in truth. Yet who should say that it would snap? Not Toulouse, certainly! for the city slept, and, sleeping, had no dreams for adventurers come out of Spain.

Once or twice in this perilous employ they passed near to some waking hive of industry. They could hear the noise and busy activity of a great printing works, where a daily paper was being prepared for the morning. Or again, they passed a barracks, yet so far

off that the sentry could not challenge them. In the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville itself twenty officers of police guarded the precincts of the great gates. Falconer saw that but thirty of his comrades rode to those gates with him. It was not until a later day that they told him how the others held the street to the barracks, ready when the alarm came to draw the regulars to other quarters of the city. Small as the number of the troopers was, however, so many horsemen gathering before the great building quickly attracted the attention of the gendarmes. Some began to parley with Lorenzo and his officers; others watched old Jussuf curiously while he nailed up a large white placard to the central door of the palace. For a moment it seemed indeed as though this tremendous jest would be played to the end, and that the White Hussars would quit the city in safety. But at the very moment when such an outcome appeared among the possible things, there came up to the place a drunken officer of chasseurs; and no sooner did he observe the troop and read a few lines of the placard than he drew his sword and called to the guard to seize Lorenzo and to hold him fast.

And so Toulouse awoke from her sleep, and in her streets was heard the blast of bugles; and men awakened told one another that the Spaniard had come, and that his army was in the city.

CHAPTER XXII

HORSE PRESSING UPON HORSE

TOULOUSE awoke, but her moments of waking gave the stranger grace. That which had been a sleepy courtyard, peopled by yawning agents of police, became, on the instant, a turbulent scene of riot and clamour. Men cried to men that the Spanish rebel had come down from the mountains. Windows were raised and heads thrust forth. Sentries fired their rifles in the air; gendarmes drew their swords, yet stood irresolute. Horses reared backward from the flash of powder; the crash of glass and the oaths of the troopers were to be heard. A great tocsin, swinging in a neighbouring steeple, began to spread the alarm to other streets. Lights shone from windows that had been in darkness. The great hotel itself was a very pandemonium.

Confusion, indeed, the bursting of the dam, the match to the pyre, yet no confusion where stood the White Hussars—no response of command against command, of clamour upon clamour. That the Spaniard had anticipated this hour Falconer could not doubt. No word was spoken, no order given from the beginning to the end of it. For a long minute he saw Lorenzo wrestling with the drunken chasseur who had clutched his bridle rein. For a long minute the swords of the gendarmes seemed at his very throat. Then, as by a visitation, the chasseur lay prone in the

gutter before the palace; the police were running for their lives to the shelter of the Hôtel de Ville.

One volley had won the victory—a volley, it may be, fired at no man, aimed at the sky above; a volley which left no dead for its story, no wounded to lament a victory. As for the hussars who had fired it, they sat as figures of iron upon their patient horses—a silent circle, a very wall of men. Shimmering light of arc lamps fell upon faces set hard, in the determination which peril breeds. Outlaws of Europe, soldiers since their boyhood, they did not care a straw for all the gendarmes in the city. The crack of pistols was their war-cry; their smoking barrels gave answer to him who asked, whence come you?

The report of the volley rang out clear above the clamour; but a long minute of silence followed upon it. Bells were still ringing, the tocsin still sounded the alarm. Men ran from all quarters of the city towards the Hôtel de Ville; horses were heard galloping in the distance, even the report of rifles. But the police were no longer at the gate, the courtyard was empty, the troopers stood victorious, and even as they waited, with hands that trembled on their reins, Lorenzo raised his sword, and from that instant the great flight began.

Flight at last, flight from the city of peril, flight to the haven of the mountains, to the shelter of the woods. Brave as the men were, that shining sword flashing in the light was as some guiding star of safety to them, some beacon of the night helping them to their homes. Even the youngest in the fellowship could share their confidence in him who led them through such an hour. The spirit of the night was upon them as a raging fever.

On they charged through narrowing streets, over bridges beneath which water glistened, out to the city gate and to the open fields beyond. Lights flashed in their giddy eyes; the faces of men looked up to them as from the very ground their horse trod; they heard the scream of women; there was ever in their ears the thunder of hoofs and the clamour of the city awakened. But they feared no longer. The wind of the new day was as snow upon the forehead; the music of that charge as a clarion note making devils of those that heard it. Had five thousand been at the gate of Toulouse, the White Hussars would have ridden at them; it may even be, would have cut a way through them.

They passed as a whirlwind through the city. The clear streets helped them to the flight. Horse pressed upon horse. Thigh to thigh they galloped through the suburbs of Toulouse. They crossed the sleeping river with the cry "A Gavarnie! A Gavarnie!" on their lips.

And then, remembering that fifty homes waited to receive them, the troop spread abroad as a fan which is opened. Two by two the men went on, madly toward the hills. They saw the lights of the city behind them; they could hear the outcry as a hum of voices far distant. But the night was theirs; the hills were their horizon; the darkness of the hour which heralds the dawn was their security. They passed into the mists and vanished as they had come; no man knew whence or whither.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MESSAGE OF FAREWELL

THE château of Foix was awake and busy when at last Lorenzo's staff made it with horses that could scarce stand upon their legs. Grooms were up and working in the vast stables; men passed in and out of the great house freely. By-and-by others of the hussars—those who had struck through the woods by many roads—came with lagging horses over the sward of the park. Quickly, deftly, they unsaddled their beasts and led them to the stalls. One by one they entered the château and went to their beds. They would have slept though all the hussars of France had been in the woods.

Falconer had ridden in to the château with Lorenzo and old Jussuf; but it was the evening of the day before he awoke from his heavy sleep and hastened to the gardens of the house, to find the Spaniard there, and with him Ximeno, the hunchback.

The lad sat at a table in a little summer-house. Just as at Torla, so here in France, he laboured to write three letters at once, as his master dictated them. Lorenzo himself wore the suit of white canvas in which Falconer had found him on his first day in the mountains. But his eye was clearer, his face a healthier colour than ever it had been in Spain. Care had left him. He walked with the buoyant step of youth.

"Well," he said, crossing the garden quickly, "so here is our recruit again. Have you slept well, Captain?"

He took the other by the arm, and answered his own question.

"*Sapristi!* you sleep like a serpent," he continued. "I have never seen such a dormouse. Do you know that the clocks strike seven?"

"And why not?" was the answer; "the man who gets up at seven o'clock in the morning is the delight of curates in my country. Let us make seven o'clock in the evening the new fashion! After all, I have only slept twelve hours."

"Twelve hours! Mother of God! it is my sleep for a week. Why, some of your comrades are in Spain by this time."

"In Spain—at Torla?"

His astonishment amused Lorenzo.

"You are a boy—a great, big boy," he said good-humouredly. "You have never used those brains of yours. They rust. By-and-by we shall teach you to use them—when we come to write our name in London!"

Falconer smiled in spite of himself.

"I must wait a long time for that lesson, Prince?"

"Very possibly. Do not the Frenchmen say that everything comes to him who knows how to wait? Very well, I know how to wait—one year, two years, three years, if necessary."

"And will England help you to wait?"

"She will help me to appeal to the imagination of my countrymen. It was for that I rode through Toulouse last night. He who would rule men must first win their fear or their love. I have won the love

of Arragon; I will win the fear of Spain. But to do that I must write my name in other cities; I must go down from the mountains and deliver a message to the nations. I must strike a blow here and a blow there, so that none will know whence the danger comes. One such blow was struck yesterday; we will strike another before the month has passed."

"Meanwhile, is it not possible that the French gendarmes will come to this house?"

"*Tais-toi, tais-toi*," he exclaimed playfully; "so you fear to walk with me, Captain, you fear that I am an *agent provocateur*—a spy?"

"I fear nothing, but there are things which I am curious to know. Is curiosity a vice, Prince?"

"It can be. It has ruined nations; strong men have sinned to answer a question. Curiosity took the Emperor to Russia—it sent you to Spain. But it will not bring French troops to the Château of Foix, for we anticipate it."

He was ever a man who loved a suggestion of mystery. Though he knew that Falconer was burning to learn how safety could come to them at Foix, he would not tell him for many minutes, but continued to pace the garden with the word unspoken. When five minutes had passed, he remembered of a sudden that his companion had not breakfasted.

"*Je m'en fâche*," he said abruptly; "you still fast, and you have a journey before you."

"A journey, Prince?"

"As I say, a journey."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"And its object?"

"Your own pleasure. The time has come when each

man goes to his home. Choose that home where you will—in your own country, in France, in Germany, in the South. Your destination does not concern me. But in one month from this day you will be at the Hôtel de France, in Paris, and you will wait there until my message is delivered.”

It was surprising news, but he gave the other no time to express surprise at it.

“The night is hot,” he said; “we will dine here in the garden, and drink a glass of wine to the health of your comrades in Spain.”

“They are in Spain, then?”

He laughed shyly.

“*Vous recommencez*,” he said gaily; “of course they are in Spain, those that have homes there.”

“And the Duke of Verdun?”

A shadow crossed his face when the Duke was named, for it implied a question as to the gold he had taken from the mail at midnight.

“The Duke is where a thousand horsemen could not catch him, *mon ami*—he is on the sea.”

He would suffer no more questioning; but sent Ximeno for a lacquey to spread a cloth for them. They dined under the shadow of cypress trees; a soft breeze of night breathed upon their faces; the great château loomed up before them as some stronghold of the ages. A dish of fish, a cutlet, a little fruit and some exquisite white wine made a banquet at such an hour and in such a place. No other came to that table; the house itself was as silent as the woods beyond it. Of those that had ridden weary and sleep hungering to its gate at dawn, not one lingered at Foix when the sun set. The phantom army existed no more. Troops beat the hills and caught shadows for their pains.

When dinner was done, Lorenzo lighted a cigar and proposed that they should walk through the park of the château. Food had made him less enigmatical and more willing to talk in plain words.

"We have sent our message," said he, with the pride of a man who has conquered armies: "all France reads of it to-day; all Europe will talk of it to-morrow. And yet we are here, Captain; we walk as children in the garden of a house. Is not that a miracle?"

"Until you have the truth of it, a miracle, indeed, Prince."

"Come," he exclaimed kindly, "our boy begins to use his brains. He knows there is something still to learn; his reason is not satisfied. He is asking again, why are the lancers from Toulouse not at Foix—*hein*, Captain?"

Falconer nodded his head.

"Well," he continued, as satisfied as one who tells the answer to a riddle, "they are not at Foix, *amigo*, because the master of Foix is at Toulouse."

Falconer turned with surprise at the words.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "then he passes for our accuser?"

"Exactly. He went to Toulouse this morning to say that a hundred men rode through his park last night towards Gèdre. He has made a complaint to the authorities. They listen to him, for he carries a great name to the city. If any one had come here this morning, he would have found fifty horses in these stables, it is true; but, then, they know in all the country that Saint Cyr is a breeder of horses, and sometimes owns a hundred. That is the secret of all our homes in Europe; it will be the secret of the home you will build for us in England presently. For you

are going to build us a house, Captain, and we are coming there to teach your countrymen that we are worthy to rule. There you have the reason why I accepted your friendship when it was offered to me. It is for that I send you away now, where you will wait until the time comes. Be faithful to me in word and deed. Forget the things you have heard and seen here at Torla and in France. In due season my message will come. You will seek in your England a house to which my yacht, which now carries the Duke of Verdun to Majorca, can approach without remark. You will pass for an agriculturist, one of your own esquires who breeds horses, and has a hundred, if need be, in his stables. Your servants will be chosen from those I send to you. I shall write your instructions as clearly as those, I was going to say, in your own military books; but God forbid that I should put my pen to such a muddle. They will be instructions a child could understand. And you are a child, *mon ami*—you have the heart of a lion, the mind of a boy. If you did not know something about cavalry, we should despair for you."

He was a man privileged to be rude, even to his friends. But his bitterest word had a little sugar wrapped about it, so that one hesitated to know if it were compliment or insult. And while his victim hesitated, he would cut in with a spice of flattery which was as the manna of friendship to the tongue. So it was on this night at the Château of Foix. Notwithstanding that there were a hundred things to be discussed, he began again to speak of that subject which was ever more interesting than all others—himself, the ego, the dreamer, the rebel.

Again he proclaimed that he was the heaven-born

leader for which Europe waited. Destiny had sent him into the world to be the master of men. As the Corsican had done, so would he. He would give Spain such an army as she had never known before. His fellow-countrymen would call him to the throne, and in return he would write victory upon their banners. Walking there, in the silence of that garden, he beheld the conquered kingdoms lying before him in some great valley of his visions; kings were suppliant and prostrate before him. He sat high above the multitudes in some mighty cathedral of the earth, and the homage of the world was his tribute.

"Give me a hundred thousand such as you," he exclaimed at last, "and I will write a page in history which all eternity shall not blot out."

For a spell, the grandeur of his schemes carried him from the scene to a world of his own. He forgot the garden, the hour, the night through which he had lived. He was a king of his imagination, and the people his mind created were his worshippers. Then the mood passed swiftly, and he came back to a memory of the hour and the place.

"Captain," he said, changing his subject with his habitual brevity, "you will set out at midnight with a guide who will conduct you to Saint Girons. From that place, the world is before you as you choose. Go where you will until the month is up. If you carry with you any memory of Spain, let it be the memory of a man who knows how to blame and how to praise. His friendship is yours now and unto your life's end. Whatever be the city to which you go, there will your unknown comrades be. To-night the White Hussars of Gavarnie are no more; next week, next month, they will people the hills again, and men will kneel in the

dust before them. Be proud of such a service and of those who follow it. Give thanks to God for the sword He has put into your hands."

For a little while he stood in the attitude of one who prays. Then swiftly he turned and left the garden, for his message of farewell was spoken.

END OF BOOK I

BOOK II

The Woman

CHAPTER XXIV

THE INTERLUDE

A HOT day in the first week of July. Paris shimmers in the angry sunshine. The season's press of carriages and cabs before the great opera-house is known no more. Even the *cocher* cracks his whip wearily. The pavements of the boulevards scorch the tired feet. A gaping company of tourists tramps doggedly toward the Place de la Concorde. By here and there, merry French girls scamper away on their bicycles, as they make for the sheltering Bois. A miserable *agent de police* droops against the windows of a shop, and seems to sleep there. The whisper of leaves is a sham, for no cooling wind blows. A city of dust, a city of drowsiness—a city whence civilization has fled.

Such was Paris for her own people. But to Noel Falconer, returned to her from Spain, she seemed a very Eldorado, a golden city, a city of his liberty. Sitting there before the doors of the Grand Café, a cigar between his lips, a long glass at his elbow, it was impossible to realize that but a week had passed

since he rode with Lorenzo in the mountains; but a week since he looked upon the lamps the Spaniard lit in the hills, and had seen the white horsemen in their home above Torla. Just as the vivid scene of a play is forgotten when we pass from the theatre to the prosaic things of our daily life, so were those momentous days already blurred in his memory. The events he had lived through were as the events of another life. In Paris he forgot them, and began to remember the woman, Isabella the Magnificent. He would see her again. A mystery no longer stood between them. She would talk to him of his journey. He would answer—he knew not with what story.

He had come to Paris straight from Lourdes—the city of miracles. A guide, found for him by the hunchback, Ximeno, brought him through the mountains to the railway. He was stopped by none, nor questioned. He had an English passport, and in his pocket-book notes upon the Bank of France to the value of five hundred pounds. The money represented a captain's share in the tribute levied by his comrades since he had been in Spain. He was to spend it as he chose. From that day until the next summons came, the White Hussars did not exist for him.

"Fear nothing for yourself, Captain," the lad had said; "they will not strike at the branches while the tree is standing. And the tree will stand yet for many a month."

"You give it months, then, Ximeno?"

He made a little grimace, ironical and not to be misunderstood.

"It depends on Spain, Excellency. He who has no axe is the friend of the tree. Do not trouble your

head with such speculations. Take your pleasure while you can, for God alone knows what the end of it will be."

"I am to wait for the next summons in Paris?"

"If you please—at the Hôtel de France, where your servant now is."

"Oh, so you know about old Benjamin?"

"My master knows about everything, Excellency."

Falconer had forgotten his man in those days of peril and of excitement unceasing. But he was glad to have the news of him; and when the Marseilles express steamed into the Gare du Nord he found that old Benjamin had received his telegram, despatched at Orleans, and was already upon the platform to meet him. All that he must have gone through, surprise, wonder, perhaps even fear, had not altered the old fellow a jot. He touched his hat with no more concern than if he had come to meet a passenger from Margate.

"Halloa, Benjamin!" was his master's greeting; "so it is really you?"

"It is, sir."

"And how the devil did you get here?"

"On a hass, sir. The Spanish gentleman, him with the infirmity, he came to fetch me."

Falconer remembered how Ximeno had left him on the night they burnt the house of Vio. His long ride through the hills was in search of old Benjamin, then?

"Well," said he, "so Master Ximeno looked after you. Did he tell you to come here?"

"He advised me to, sir. 'If you don't go to Paris, you're a dead man,' he says. 'Very good,' says I. And so I came, sir."

"You didn't think I was dead, Benjamin?"

"Dead, sir? Oh, no, sir—leastwise, not while the young lady——"

"Had charge of me, eh, Benjamin?"

He nodded his head, as much as to say, "We know all about that." Presently he added a piece of information which was as strange as it was unlooked for.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said he, "I wrote to the other party."

"The other party?"

"Yes, sir—the lady opposite ninety-two. Your orders, sir, you'll remember?"

"Yes, I remember, Benjamin—you were to write to her if you had no news of me."

"Exactly, sir."

"And what did you say to her?"

"I told her that you'd gone off to the mountains with—with—a young gentleman."

"Discreet as ever, eh, Benjamin?"

He stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"A man doesn't serve in the 'tenth' without learning a thing or two, sir. That ain't the first young woman as I've made into a man—not by a hundred."

They drove to the hotel without further word. Though Falconer did not confess it, he was glad enough to hear the news. The indiscretion would bring tidings of her whom, above any living, he desired to see. And the surmise was justified. The first thing the *concierge* at the Hôtel de France handed to him was a letter from Madame Gavarnie.

It was but a line, scrawled in a fine, pointed hand, which had all the fashionable qualities of illegibility.

"I shall be in Paris at six o'clock," she said.

He spent the afternoon upon the boulevards, but returned to the Rue St. Honoré by half-past five. Thereafter, he counted the minutes until she came. When at last she stepped from her carriage his hand trembled so that he could scarce hold the paper he had pretended to read. Twice before in his life had he seen her. Yet at the third time he could still say that, in all France, there was not a more beautiful woman. Weary as she was, weary, and with the dust of travel upon her pretty dress, men whispered as she passed them in the hall. Women turned to envy her superb figure.

"I have an apartment here," she said quickly, while her hand rested for a moment in his; "you will come and take tea with me."

She swept through the crowd of loiterers as though she were already the mistress of the hotel. The landlord himself was waiting in her room to point out its beauties. She dismissed him curtly, and sank wearily into an arm-chair.

"Oh, my friend," she said, "how I have waited for to-day! And you are really here, in Paris. I cannot believe it. It is another!"

She laughed at her own thought, and removed her hat, to show her exquisite black hair in rippling coils about her little ears. The old manner was not wanting, the manner of the young girl, the dignity of the woman.

"*Dites donc*," she continued, before he could answer her, "how shall we begin? What shall you tell me first? What shall I ask you?"

"Ask me of the Spaniard?" he suggested.

"And why, *mon ami*? Is he not in London? Did not I see him there two days ago?"

"Madame Gavarnie," he replied earnestly, "our friend could not have been in London two days ago, for he was with me then at the Château of Foix."

"You are sure of it?"

"As sure of it as a man who has lived with him can be sure of anything. And you?"

"I saw him with my own eyes at the Savoy Hotel. They told me that he had just arrived from Madrid."

"From Madrid?"

"As I say."

"You spoke to him?"

She shook her head.

"He was passing down the stairs, and I was with my friends. Why do you ask me?"

"Because the Spanish papers said that he was in Madrid at the beginning of this week. If they were right, there would be nothing wonderful in your seeing him in London the day before yesterday. And yet I know that they are wrong. I have lived with this man for days together. Save for a few hours, he has never been out of my sight. He could not be in the mountains and in the city on the same day."

"He *could* not be, Captain?"

It was a question, and not an affirmation. The superstition of the woman was awakened. The story which little Giralda believed was believed by this lady of education and of the world.

"Of course, he could not be," was the quick answer. "We are not children, my dear lady. We do not believe in many things—certainly not in miracles. I have been to Spain and done what you wished. To-day I am as big a rebel as any of them. All

that you read in the papers here concerning the outbreak in Toulouse may be said of me. It would be no surprise if the police laid a hand upon my shoulder this morning. But I do not deceive myself about the man I serve. A born general—yes; a dreamer—without doubt. But a new Messiah of war—certainly not. Neither that nor adventurer, as the Press calls him. A fanatic he may be; but he has no gospel to preach except the gospel of the hill-men, no creed but the creed of the brigand. A thousandth chance might make him master of Spain, as he promises that he will be. If that chance fail, he will be sent to Madrid as a rebel, and will lose his head. There is his story told in plain French. The peasants of Arragon, brought to their knees by a little fire and a good deal of gilt and tinsel, worship him as a God. You and I do nothing of the sort. We keep our heads, and trust that he will keep his.”

He spoke bluntly enough, for now that he was out of Spain, awe of the Spaniard no longer put a curb upon his tongue.

“Have you told the Prince that?” she asked, with a suggestion of irony; “would you repeat your words if he were in Paris now?”

It was a frank question, and he answered it as frankly:—

“I should tell him nothing of the kind. He is not the sort of man to whom one can say such things.”

She ceased to fan herself and sighed.

“How true that is!” she exclaimed, with the air of one helpless before her destiny. “I have known it since the day my father died. Yet what shall we say of him? Is he an adventurer? We know that he is

not. Don Carlos had no general on his staff whom he valued above this lieutenant of hussars. My father believed in him before any of his countrymen. 'He will rule at Madrid,' was his dying word to me. I think the same when I hear his voice. When he is gone—*mais, à quoi bon ?* We shall never know, you and I, or we shall know when it is too late."

"You mean, dear lady?"

"I mean that his wife will answer the question."

She began to fan herself again. A melancholy waiter entered the room, and set before them a pot of milky dish-water, known as tea in Paris. When he was gone, she apologized for her hospitality.

"*Quelle bêtise !* I forget that you are a man."

"Is that a compliment?"

She laughed merrily.

"Certainly, because I remember that you are a friend. And being a friend, you will smoke a cigarette, and tell me if the Hôtel de France has good English whisky."

The melancholy waiter returned once more with a decanter of whisky and a siphon. She drank a little of the dish-water, and seemed to be waiting for her friend to speak. Instinct told him that this was a moment which should affect his life for good or ill.

"Madame Gavarnie," he exclaimed suddenly, "if the wife of Lorenzo answers our question, it will not help you and me very much."

"And why?"

"Because we shall not know her."

She set down her cup and looked at him with those burning black eyes wherein the whole soul of the woman appeared to lie.

"Shall not know her, Captain?"

"As I say, shall not know her. For she will be a woman whose love will blind her to the fact that the man she marries is destined, possibly, for the throne, more probably for the scaffold. She will marry him upon an impulse. She will not be a clever woman, who will say, 'My father wished it while he lived, but would not wish it if he were alive to-day.' She will be the sport of passion, not the creature of ambition. You understand me, dear lady?"

He had crossed the room and now stood at her side, while she looked into his face wondering. That she did not resent the words was plain. The bond of their friendship was strengthened in that moment.

"Do you think," he continued, "that your story is unknown to me? Ten days in the mountains have told me much. I know what your father wished. I know that the man's influence is no less strong in your case than in that of the men who follow him. He, on his part, relies upon your name to win him Arragon. All that he has not you have: a great tradition of family, a great estate, the love of an heroic people—broad, based upon years of love. For these things he will seek to hold you to your word."

"And if I am held?"

"It will be to see him in a Spanish prison, perhaps upon a Spanish scaffold, before the year is done."

"But you, you put your sword at his service."

"Why not? I am a man without ties, without name—a man fallen from the social tree as a leaf which is withered. The life he offers me is the life I love. The money he pays me is the money I cannot win in my own country. It does not matter a straw to any one whether I am alive or dead. With you it

is otherwise—you have all that a woman can wish; is it not madness of you to remember Spain at all?"

He could see that she was reasoning his words closely. When she answered him, she stood up and laid a little hand upon his arm.

"It is madness," she said, "the madness which has written the history of women, and will write it again. We cannot argue, *mon ami*. Here and now I know that you speak the truth. But when he comes, it is to tell me of a new world, of a new city, and I am the mistress of it. There is no logic which explains these things. If I found a friend, if there were one to whom I could go and say, 'Save me from myself,' it would be different. But that day is not yet."

He took her hand and held it close.

She did not draw back from him. He could feel her hot breath upon his cheek. He thought that it was an ecstasy to stand so beside her.

"Tell me that you wish it, and it is enough," he continued quickly. "The rest shall be my work."

Her hand trembled in his. He knew that she was afraid, for her eyes betrayed her.

"He will kill you," she said.

He laughed at the threat.

"Am I a child, to be frightened at a rod?"

She was silent a little while, but suddenly she turned to him and began to speak excitedly.

"A man destined for the scaffold!" she cried, repeating his own words, "and those that serve him——"

"May share the scaffold with him," he said quickly.

A cry, half-suppressed, rose to her lips. He heard it as sweet music, for it told him that he had won her love.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIGARO MAKES A PROMISE

“YOU must leave Paris—now, at once.”

It was twelve o'clock upon the morning of the next day. He sat with Isabella at breakfast in the little Café d'Arras, over against the Madeleine. For the nonce he had forgotten Spain and all that Spain meant to him.

“And why should I leave Paris, Madame Gavarnie?”

She passed him the *Figaro* with others of the morning papers.

“They tell the whole story there, or try to,” she said simply, “and they are clever, my friend. While the Prince was in Spain it did not matter. The Spaniard's ‘to-morrow’ is the Frenchman's yesterday. At the end of the week the police here will tell you the names of the White Hussars. Those who ride through Toulouse will ride in the Conciergerie. *Je n'aime pas cette course moi.*”

She rested her pretty chin upon her hand—a gesture she loved—and watched him while he read. It was difficult to follow the print with those great eyes upon him, and he told her so. At that particular moment he did not care a straw for all the police in France.

“Well,” said she, when he had struggled with it a little while, “am I not right?”

“You are more than right—you are charming,

Isabella! Turn your head a little more—so—and I have a perfect picture of you in the glass."

She laughed, but turned her head.

Had it not been for this exquisite figure of the woman, he could have read the papers with avidity. In all truth there was news enough for a man to read. And there is no more engaging occupation than that of finding in a newspaper the half of a story of which the whole is known to the reader. It was grotesque to read the account of Lorenzo and of his comrades, which the French papers of that July morning attempted. Twenty stories of the Spaniard—all authentic and all lies. "A clever brigand," said one pompous scribe, "who will be arrested and guillotined within a week." "A nephew of Don Carlos," said a second, "who leads a handful of hillmen and is disowned by his party." "A suspected anarchist," wrote a third self-appointed prophet, "with designs upon the life of the President." All agreed that the *coup* at Toulouse was without political significance. Yet all went on to say that Europe must defend herself and hunt down these assassins as she would hunt vermin. "Many of them," wrote the *Figaro*, "are among the outcasts of the world. They have neither money nor a political creed. A week, a month will find them quarrelling among themselves. We promise the arrest of Lorenzo de la Cruz before many hours have passed."

Such was the account that Falconer read. To say that it made him anxious for his own safety would be absurd. He had been a spectator of, rather than participator in, the crimes committed on the railway. No police would trouble themselves about him while Lorenzo was at large. Nevertheless, Isabella's concern

for his safety was very dear to him ; and he was vain enough to encourage it.

"You must leave Paris," she repeated ; "you are not safe here for a day, an hour. I tremble every time an *agent de police* passes us. You would not wish to see me suffer, Captain ?"

"I would go a thousand miles to save you from that."

She began to put on her gloves. Her expressive face spoke of many emotions. It was changing as the lights upon a jewel. He remembered that the forefathers of Isabella de Gavarnie had been the friends of kings.

"We must not think of ourselves—you and I," she continued, presently ; "there will be days enough for that when Spain is saved. And we must be faithful to the Prince. They speak of arresting him when twenty hours are passed. They might as well hunt the stars. The dangers which menace him are not the danger of his enemies, but of his friends. We must save him from those friends, Captain Noel !"

It was not flattering to him that she should come round again to this talk of the man who haunted her life. But he understood her motive, and had pride in it.

"Lorenzo has one friend in Paris, at any rate," he said, a little curtly.

"He has two," she said quietly. "If all were as you, there would be a new king in Spain before the leaves fall."

He lit a cigarette and began to talk to her seriously. The time for plain words had come.

"If we are to talk of that," he said, "let us understand each other once and for all. The oath I have

given I will keep. While I wear his uniform 'he shall find me ready to respect it. But it does not follow, because I have put my sword at his service, that he is the master of my private affairs. I do not allow him to say to me, 'You must think this, this is the creed you must believe, here is the woman you must love.' As a soldier, I will follow him to the end; as a man, I will live my own life and safeguard my own liberty. Let us understand this and the rest is easy. We shall be the better friends for understanding it. Our own difficulties will be fewer. As for my friendship for him, I am ready and willing to prove that now. You speak of those, his friends, who are a danger to him. Show me where they are, and I will answer them to-day, now, while the danger is still young. I am an Englishman, and have some notions of honour."

He spoke with great earnestness; and he could see that he pleased her.

"When I hear you, Captain Noel," she said, after a pause, "I wish that I had been born an English-woman. Let us go and begin our work."

"You leave Paris, then?"

"For the Châlet de Puys. You shall see your own English ships from its windows. My brother, Sebastian, is there and his friends."

They rose from the table as she spoke. As they left the *café* Falconer remembered that little Giralda, the gipsy, had given him the name of the man who would betray Lorenzo.

And the name upon his lips was that of Sebastian de Gavarnie.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT THE CHÂLET DE PUY

THEY left for Dieppe that afternoon and drove to her ch  let at Puy in time for dinner. There were guests already in the house—an American by the name of Shirley Bridges; a young Spanish officer of lancers, Captain Navas de Tolsa; his wife; and Sebastian de Gavarnie himself. Falconer recognised the young Spaniard at once. He was the man whom he had found on the stairs of the gloomy house in Bayswater where fortune had brought him face to face for the first time with Isabella de Gavarnie.

Of the others, the American, called by every one “the Judge,” interested him the most. He found him blunt and practical, as all his kind. He had seen many men and many cities, and could talk of them with profit to those who heard him.

During dinner, this strange company discussed flip-pantly the flippant gossip of the day. They might have been dining at the Caf   Anglais or at Voisin’s. In the intervals of silence the waves were heard thundering upon the shingle one hundred feet below the house. Red and green lights shone upon the sleeping sea—the lights of the ships of England and of the fishermen’s boats returning. No man thought or spoke of the White Hussars of Gavarnie. Falconer asked himself if he had dreamed of them. The young Spaniard, Isabella herself, forbade the illusion.

Sebastian de Gavarnie, in truth, had been his close study from the first. He saw a youth with a skin abnormally white, with features drawn and haggard, with cadaverous cheeks and restless eyes. Had he been a doctor, he would have pronounced such a one an epileptic. The mystery in that gloomy house of Bayswater seemed a mystery no more. The Spaniard had fallen in a trance there, he thought, and that was his story. He was asking himself, why? when the two women went to the drawing-room, and the servants offered him coffee. He could hear Isabella singing one of the love songs of Arragon. He became conscious that the American was talking, and began to listen.

"That goes home," said the man, patting his bulging shirt-front in the region of the enormous diamond stud. "Last time I heard that chantey I was out with Lorenzo, two and thirty miles from Buenos Ayres. He hadn't a shilling in his purse, and outraged humanity was hunting me with a gun. We'd have sold the Kingdom of Spain for fifty dollars, gentlemen, and thrown Portugal in for a brandy cocktail."

Captain Tolsa joined in merrily.

"I was in Mendoza once," he said. "The women are devilish fine. I believe that I married one of them."

"You knew the Prince in the Brazils?" Falconer asked Sebastian, speaking to him almost for the first time.

"I knew a lieutenant of hussars, who is now called 'Prince' by his dupes," he answered, with a curious smile.

"Then he has no right to the title?"

"No more than my valet—less, perhaps, for my valet is merely a thief, while the other is a murderer as well."

Tolsa laughed. The American rolled his cigar in his lips.

"*Pidno, pidno*," he said, raising his hand warningly; "you should always swallow that kind of thing done up in silver, Captain. It gets there all right, and it's sweeter on the tongue."

Sebastian took a cigarette from a little gold case. He had the air of a man nursed on gee-gaws and jewelled trifles. Notwithstanding his display of bravado, his hand trembled when he held the cigarette to the candle.

"We talk of a mountebank," he said, presently, "and we serve him. Am I to be the only one of four with courage to speak the truth? Here is an Englishman who has been in Spain for a week. I would wager a hundred guineas that he thinks as I do."

It was a surprise to Falconer that they knew of the visit to Torla, as much a surprise as that strange tone in which these men spoke of one who held their lives in the hollow of his hand.

"If you are asking my opinion of your general," he said, seeing that the other waited for it, "that is hardly a subject I care to discuss here—possibly before his friends, more probably before his enemies."

"Perhaps both," said the American bluntly.

The Spaniard was more honest.

"I am no friend of his; I am no enemy. One is not the enemy of a lieutenant of hussars. There is no reason because my father was infatuated by this man that I should be. If I thought for a time that he would save my country, I do not think so now. What has he done? He has burnt houses in Arragon, he has robbed the mail trains, he has played the ghost to win the love of the most ignorant peasantry in Europe.

Spain will not be saved by one who can win her love and not her fear. A clown will not help her, and this man is a clown. His very threats are worthy of the theatre."

"He threatens you?" some one asked.

"As they threaten in books. Read that paper; I received it an hour ago."

He took a little note from his cigarette case, and tossed it on the table. There was one line of writing upon it, and that was in French. Falconer picked up the paper and read these words:—

"At ten o'clock to-night you must answer."

Instinctively all looked at the clock in the corner of the room.

It wanted then a quarter to the hour of ten.

The quaintly carved case in which the warning timepiece stood had something human in the grim shape of it. The minute-hand raced round before their eyes. On the beach below the chalet the flooding tide jettisoned the shingle it had nursed, and rolled it upward with the sound of shivering stone and the beat of waters. Isabella was still singing in the drawing-room.

"That's Lorenzo all over," suddenly exclaimed the American, when the silence had become painful. "He must have been born in a slouch hat somewhere behind Drury Lane Theatre. I used to tell him so. It was when we were up in Rio advertising for a revolution on the easy-purchase system. He was a theatrical even then. He couldn't lift his glass like any ordinary creature. The man was born to it, and he'll die to it, with his leg in the limelight."

Tolsa feigned a laugh at the American's view of things. Sebastian himself sat quite still with the slip

of paper still held between his fingers. The constraint, possibly the excitement they all suffered, was beyond endurance. Falconer answered the American, not because he had anything to say, but that he might forget the clock. He laughed at himself because he believed that any beat of the pendulum might bring Lorenzo in among them.

"It's all very well to be theatrical," he exclaimed, on an impulse, "but an inherited genius for the poses of melodrama does not help a man to be in Spain and in London upon the same day. That's a subject I am very curious to talk to you about. The stories I refer to will be known to every one here. The truth of them I have yet to learn."

Shirley Bridges knocked the ash off his cigar. Tolsa helped himself to claret. The eyes of all glanced furtively at the clock.

"Be damned to his stories!" exclaimed the American, striking a light savagely; "there's more ways of being in London than the railroad and the steamboat. For instance, you might know a newspaper man, Captain."

"And if you did?"

"Why, you'd rub the burnish off his family honour in three fingers of whisky and two dollars under the glass."

"You think it is done that way?"

"I'd stake my salvation on it."

"He merely causes a paragraph to appear saying that he is in Madrid, when in reality he is at Torla, or in Paris?"

"Exactly. That's the way it's done—just the same as any prima donna making love to the newspaper boys in New York Harbour. I tell you the man was sent

down to this earth to blow a tin trumpet, and he'll blow it to the last. That's no reason why you and I should dance to the music when we're not wanting saltatory exercise. As for me, my money's on the table. I'll see the thing through so far as the door of the police-station, and then I'll call my chariot. If there's money in it, I share; if there's no money in it, I'm going to play the faithful friend across in New Mexico. The rest of you can do what you please. If it's coming to bits of paper like that pipe-light yonder, the sooner you make up your minds the better."

He turned to them for an answer, but Falconer's was the next word.

"Of course that's child's play," he said when he saw that the unwelcome silence was overtaking them once more; "what can the man do? He is in Spain to my knowledge. Or, if he has left Spain, he cannot enter this house until he has knocked at the door. You do not pretend that he is an assassin. There are four of us here. Are we going to cry, as children at a boggy?"

No one answered him. In truth, the talk magnified the mystery. He said to himself that here were four men perhaps a thousand miles from the man they derided, and yet his spirit was in the room with them—his name could quicken their hearts, a line of his written upon a paper could set their hands trembling. Deep down in their minds they believed that ten o'clock would bring Lorenzo to the house. Of that he was sure.

If he had been asked by what power of will one man could so affright four, he would have been unable to give a reason. There are potentialities of the mind of which science knows nothing. Here and there in the

world, once or twice in the centuries, a man arises and goes upward through the ranks of men until his name is a chapter line for histories and his life is bread and meat to biographers. How these men differ from other men we do not know. What equation of circumstance it is that completes their destinies we cannot tell. Sufficient that they succeed where a hundred thousand, born perchance with the same faculties, but lacking the circumstances, have failed.

It was five minutes to ten o'clock when the American declared himself. From that moment all heart had left the discussion. The Spaniard sat with lips parched and dry. He moistened them with a little wine, and listened indifferently to Falconer's suggestion that if they really believed there would be a scene at ten o'clock, they should go to the drawing-room.

"And shelter ourselves behind the petticoats," cried Tolsa; but he watched the clock with staring eyes.

"Call it anything you please. Here we are, sitting like four children who expect to see a bogey. Frankly, I do not believe that it is anything but a jest. If you believe it, and it is on your nerves, why not change the subject and the room? Madame de Gavarnie is waiting for us now, and it is three minutes to ten, gentlemen."

He rose from the table, but no one stirred.

"It's curiosity, I guess," said the American, taking up a pear, and peeling it nonchalantly. "The same thing sent Lot's wife into the salt trade."

"And you?"—to Sebastian.

The young Spaniard threw himself back in his chair and folded his arms. His eyes were still upon the swiftly advancing finger.

"I do not run away from a mountebank," he said.

"Nevertheless, you discuss him."

He uttered an exclamation of indifference. The minute hand of the clock began to steal over the great Roman twelve.

"I discuss him as one discusses anything of which people talk. The day is past when I hope for him or for Spain."

"You have told him that?"

"I shall tell him so to-night."

For an instant they sat in silence. The clock began to strike the hour. Sebastian counted the strokes with a hand which twitched at every note of the bell. There was a strange flush upon his cheeks; his tongue moistened his burning lips.

When the last stroke had fallen, Falconer spoke to him again.

"You see," he said, "there is ten o'clock, and nothing has happened."

There was no answer. The American started up from his chair and took a candle in his hand.

"Hush, for God's sake!" he cried.

There was something in the man's voice which brought them all to their feet. For a moment Falconer did not understand what it was; but when he looked at the face of the Spaniard he read the truth on it. And in that instant Sebastian de Gavarnie rolled from the chair and fell dead at his feet.

CHAPTER XXVII

JE T'AIMÉ

ON the fifth day after the death of Sebastian de Gavarnie, Falconer stood alone in the gardens of the Châlet de Puys. Below him was the quaint old harbour city, a fleet of shipping at its quays, the gargoyles of its Norman churches thrusting themselves out above the old gabled houses and caves which had stood since the days of the Crusaders. On the right hand lay the rolling downs; before him the sparkling sea flung spindrift to the sunbeams. He watched the ships of England as their white sails stood out in the glory of the morning light. He wondered if he would ever look upon London again or hear the voices of the men who had been his friends.

A great awe had fallen upon the house since that night of death. Ascribed by the doctors to fear; but to the others a new mystery in their life of mystery. Servants passed in and out of the châlet with muted steps; priests came from the churches to pray in the darkened rooms; the hush of death was everywhere. Of the guests, the Englishman alone remained to take up those burdens which rightly fall to men in such an hour. Tolsa, the young Spanish captain, had been early away. The American left on the second day. He spoke of Lorenzo's yacht then waiting for him at Majorca, and said that he was the commander of it.

"We'll meet again, Captain, though God knows

where," was his farewell; "this hole-and-corner business is about played out. If we're to do anything big in Spain, this is the time for it. A word would set the mountains going. Carlos sits at home writing manifestoes, and I don't know that he isn't wise. Meanwhile, take a straight word from me. There's danger at the Châlet de Puys. Go back to London, or to Paris, or to any place where my lady isn't going. And don't reckon it an offence for me to speak out. I knew Isabella's father and I know her. What's got to be has got to be. Call it fate, or destiny, or anything you like, but she'll marry Lorenzo before the year is out, and that's the long and short of it."

Falconer heard him to the end, but scarcely answered him. Possibly he realized the truth of his words. Since Sebastian de Gavarnie died, the course of his own life seemed to have changed. What miracle, he asked himself, was beyond the power of a man who could strike his enemy dead with a line written upon a sheet of paper? An epileptic, the doctors said, whose nerves were so played upon by fear that he died at last from the anticipations of fear. Falconer believed them, and yet, believing, found a greater awe of him whose mind could plan such a revenge and make it good.

He was thinking of these things, of his own future, and of the strange days which must lie before him, as he stood in the garden on that fifth morning and watched Isabella herself coming from the house to meet him. She wore a simple gown of black cloth, and in her eyes was the look of one who had suffered but had complained to none. She met him with hands outstretched—a superb figure, upon which the sun fell bewitchingly.

"Noel," she asked, without any other greeting, "is it true that you are going to London to-day?"

He turned at the words.

"If you wish it, Isabella!"

"If I wish it! Yet is it not best? Are we not as two children, carried we know not whither? Shall we find the light again here, in this house?"

He took her hands and held them in a strong clasp.

"We shall find the light when we find our own courage," he said quickly. "God knows—if I had the right to speak to you!"

"You have every right," she answered, "the right of a man called to a woman's side when she stood utterly alone. Is there any greater right than that?"

He let her hand fall and turned to gaze over the blue sea to the horizon of golden water.

"The outcast and the beggar—what right has he! May he say to a woman, because she is friendless, I love you, I will be your friend? Will she believe him when the word is said?"

She stood before him and put her arms about his neck.

"She has believed it from the first day, Noel. Take me to your home. Let me stand alone no more. I love you."

Her head sank upon his shoulder. He saw the sunshine, and the blue sea, and the white sails of the ships as in a golden mist. He thought that he began to live in that hour when she said to him, "I love you; take me to your home."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SHADOW OF THE MAN

THEY returned to London together on the following morning—Isabella to the gloomy house in Bayswater; Falconer to his old rooms in the Marylebone Road. He had not yet spoken to her of marriage; for of that he scarce dared to speak. She had said that they were as children, walking blindly, and he knew in his heart that she spoke the truth. Ever about him as the shadow which must dog his future was the vision of Lorenzo and of the lonely hills of Spain. The noises of London affrighted him. He shunned men. He was as one dragged from the dreamy life of the fifteenth century to the whirling activity of the nineteenth. He would stand at the window of his room and listen to the whistles of the engines, and the clatter of the vans, and the cries of hawkers, and ask himself if those other things had ever been—the burning houses, the white troop riding through the hills, the caverns full of silent Spaniards, the ruined castle of Torla. Would the summons ever come to call him back to such a life? He dare not think of that. He lived in the gardens of love new born, and would not look beyond the gates.

He had five hundred pounds in his pocket when he returned from Spain, and wondrous was the reception he met with. No more cracked cups upon his table; no longer a landlady to ask audibly if the "fourth

floor" meant to pay his rent, or if he did not. Smiles everywhere, smiles, and clean plates, and water that boiled, and "No trouble at all, Capt'ing," and "Very pleased, I am sure, Capt'ing"; and, above all, old Benjamin in a new suit of clothes and a new sigh, and so eloquent with strange tales of Spain, to be told in the kitchen, that "each particular hair" would "stand on end, like quills upon the fretful porcupine."

"Benjamin," he said to him on the tenth morning, "before all things discretion. You would not be arrested by the police of France and put upon a French treadmill, eh? Very well, then. Be careful and hold your tongue, Benjamin. Ask Mrs. Jeb, our landlady, to amuse you. I'm sure she's willing."

Old Benjamin shook his head sadly.

"I was amused like that once before, sir," he said, in his usual humble tone; "it cost me a hundred pounds to keep the case out of court. I've learnt a thing or two since then, sir—and one of them is how to hold my tongue."

He went away muttering to his room in the attics; but Falconer was content with the hint and said no more of it. Odd he thought it that he should have no sense of liberty even in his own country; but so it was, and the shadow of the man hovered ever about him and the woman he loved. A memory of Lorenzo could still a word upon his lips, could set Isabella trembling in his arms. He laughed at her fears as he had laughed at little Giralda in the woods. None the less those fears pursued him, were with him waking or sleeping—the shadow and the oath he had sworn. When a few days of this strange liberty had passed, he must go to Paris again—Heaven alone knew upon what errand of pillage and of murder.

Any hour might bring the summons and shatter his hopes and leave him alone as he had been when first he heard Isabella's voice. He could not walk the streets but he must imagine that some of his comrades were near him, that perchance they touched him as he passed. A week, a month, and he would ride with them again—to the prison and the garotte, as all right reason told him. No plan came to him, no logic helped him in those dark days of hope unjustifiable and of inaction unalterable. He would make Isabella his wife—and all hereafter let destiny dictate. He would meet the Spaniard face to face when the evil day came, and the sword should be his answer for good or ill.

These things were much in his mind on the evening of that tenth day when he left the Marylebone Road and set out for Bayswater. To him her gloomy house was a house of gloom no more. He would depict it with her sweet face at the window, watching, with her exquisite figure adorning it. Her own great courage breathed a spell upon him. For her there were no difficulties which a woman's wit might not overcome. Together they would go to Paris and meet Lorenzo for the last time. Her influence would obtain her lover's release.

"A word from me will win him Biscay," she would say. "I shall not refuse that word, but he must give you back your oath. We must be free; we could not live with that shadow on our lives."

He remembered those words as he drove to her house on that tenth day and began to think of all the things they must speak about—the manner of the wedding ceremony, the place where they would live, the future, when, in her arms, he would forget

what the past had been. All that he had suffered should be obliterated in this, the immeasurable love of one called suddenly from an unknown world to be the friend of a man forsaken, to lift him from the shadows to the light of her eyes, to show him a land of promise surpassing the gardens of his vision.

He thought of these things and love was in his heart, such a love of man for woman as few may know, when the cab set him down at her house and he heard the bell strike a mournful note, as though in a building empty and desolate. When presently an old crone opened to him and said that her mistress had gone to Paris, he did not answer her at once nor comprehend the words.

"She has gone to Paris!" he exclaimed, at last.

"To-day, sir—at one o'clock."

He turned upon his heel and left the house. There was no message. He heard nothing but a dull sound as the dirge of the sea beating upon a rugged shore. He did not see the lights in the houses nor the faces of the people who passed him by.

"I love you; take me to your home."

So she had spoken in that happy hour in Paris. He recalled the words as he awoke from the dream which was a dream no more.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE AFTERMATH OF DREAMS

ON the third day her letter came. He could have read its contents almost before he opened the envelope. She had left London for Spain, and was then in Paris. The urgent need of her own people called her back to them. All must be sacrificed to that need—even her love and her life. When Spain was won, it might be otherwise. Until that day came, she must think of her own country and of nothing else.

That the man had come between them he never doubted. The word of the Spaniard was to be read in the very letter she wrote. All the talk of her country and her people came but to this—that the adventurer was still the master of her mind, able to command her as he chose and to win her obedience. To him she meant a surpassing influence of a great name, the support of a great house. For that he would scheme and plan as for nothing else in all the world. With such an influence Falconer made no effort to cope. The light had left his life as suddenly as it had come to him. In an instant he had been cast back to that abyss of loneliness from which the woman's hand had snatched him. There was nothing left now in all the world. He shut himself in his wretched garret and

forgot that the city rolled its tide of life before his windows. He was scarcely conscious of his own life. He lived still in a world of dreams, but they were dreams of death.

It was the hour of twilight upon the seventh day after Isabella had left him that the last of these dreams came. The hills of Spain were before him as he dreamed, and the White Hussars again rode through them. Anon, the scene was changed swiftly, and from the woods of Torla he passed to many cities, and at last to the great city of Madrid and to a prison there. So real was it all that he could see the very faces of his jailers; could touch and taste the noxious food they set before him, and even feel the lash of the whip one of them carried in his hand.

He dreamed that he slept in a cell of this jail, and when he awoke they led him out to a great square where was a mighty concourse of people, and a scaffold set up; and on the scaffold stood the terrible garrotte and the chair wherein sit those who never on earth shall rise again. When he looked for the second time towards the place, he saw that a prisoner was bound in the chair and that the horrid collar of steel was already about his neck. Then a hand snatched the veil from the prisoner's face, and he beheld himself.

From such a dream he awoke with trembling limbs. The room was almost dark; the rumble of traffic in the street without echoed as a sound afar. He started up from the sofa, for all was still real to him. Somehow, by what means he did not know, the conviction came to him that he was not alone there. He peered into the dark shadows and thought still to see the hand which had snatched the veil from his

face in the prison at Madrid. Then he heard a man breathing, and in the dim light a figure took shape. It was that of Lorenzo.

For a moment they faced each other in silence. Surprise forbade Falconer to speak. He waited for the Spaniard, who answered with a laugh which seemed forced and unreal.

"You do not sleep well, Captain," he exclaimed. "If I did not know you, I should think that you have a past. Do the dead rise from their graves—*heim*? Well, we will light the gas, and that will bury them again."

Falconer obeyed him mechanically. All was held dormant at the sound of that voice. He could neither explain nor justify it. He was not afraid, but he was silent. The speech he had made up so laboriously never left his lips. When the gas was lighted, he saw before him a man dressed as any other foreigner who might be seen any day in Leicester Square or Piccadilly. The eyes of the man alone carried him back to the terrible scenes of the mountains.

"Why have you come here—now?" he asked, at last.

Lorenzo rose and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Sit," he said; "we must have a long talk together, you and I, Captain Falconer."

Falconer sat as a child obeying his father. The Spaniard continued to touch him with his hand, but the gesture was a kindly one.

"I know your story," he said simply. "I am sorry for you. You have been a traitor to Spain and to me. If you were one of my countrymen, I would have killed you as you lay there—for the good of Spain.

But you are a boy,—a foolish boy,—and I shall talk to you instead.”

Falconer leaned back in his chair and looked at him. A voice whispered in his ear, “Why do you not answer him?” He asked himself the question; yet, if his life had depended upon it, he could not have spoken twenty words coherently.

“Oh,” he stammered, “and by what right——”

“*Arrivons!*” he exclaimed sternly; “do you speak of right to me, to one who was the friend of Isabella when you were a boy at school? The dishonour is yours, Captain Falconer. You have not kept faith—neither the faith of the soldier nor the man. I treated you as a brother. I said, He is an Englishman, and his word is better than the oath of another. Are you the one to speak to me of right?”

His question brought the blood to Falconer’s cheeks.

“There was no honour at stake,” he replied hotly. “The word which I gave I have kept and will keep.”

“A sophistry! a sophistry! I am a man of camps, and do not argue as a schoolmaster. That is not the spirit which will win us a kingdom; that is the spirit of a pedagogue. Take my words as a man would take them. The day has come when I have need of all my friends. Is the Englishman the one who turns from me on that day? Shame, my friend, to tell me so!”

He began to pace the room as one who thinks of many things. Falconer knew that he was in the right against him, yet had no argument, but the childish argument of a threat.

“Let us make no professions of friendship,” he exclaimed. “The day for that has passed. It is not rather for our friends——”

The Spaniard stood at the words. The challenge amused him.

"Captain," he said presently, beginning to pace the room again, "men who fight for the honour of a country do not begin by cutting one another's throats. That is your English way, perhaps; it is not my way. We shall not fight, you and I; we are too clever for that. And Spain has need of us. Shall we let a woman stand between her and freedom? Isabella de Gavarnie—she will save my country! Is the selfishness of one man to prevent such a work? I tell you that ten thousand lives shall not count in the stake we play for. Forget that these days have been. Remember your oath to me and to your comrades. Serve me in the field, and when the field is won, come to me, and if I have wronged you, I will answer you as you wish!"

He spoke as one pleading for a great cause, and when they had been silent a little Falconer answered him as honestly.

"When Madame Gavarnie left London seven days ago, she promised to become my wife. You knew of that!"

"Am I blind then, Captain Falconer?"

"And if I go with you now, that promise remains?"

He laughed scornfully.

"I make no conditions—while she is necessary to Spain. You are two children playing with the fire, and it will burn you by-and-by. You will forget in a week. When the year is done, you will come to Madrid to see her in my house, and laugh at yourself for these days. Let there be truce until that time comes. Begin to forget to-night when you leave London with me!"

He waited for no assent, but rang the bell and brought old Benjamin sighing up the stairs.

"Make your master's trunk," he said; "he leaves London to-night. He will be away a month—two months—a year. If any ask for him, he is in Paris!"

Benjamin ejaculated, "Very good, sir," and left the room. The fever of the hill life began to burn in Falconer's veins again as it had burned before the gates of Toulouse.

"You go to Paris?" he asked excitedly.

The Spaniard raised his hand dramatically.

"We go to those who must pay for our army in Arragon."

END OF BOOK II

BOOK III

The Downfall

CHAPTER XXX

FOUR AT THE RAG

FOUR men sat in the smoking-room of the Rag—a general of cavalry, a genial major, an imperturbable captain and a novelist. Lunch was done and a waiter served coffee and cigars. When the man had left the room, the novelist, who lunched often with the soldiers to pick up scraps of authority for his adventure stories, resumed the conversation which the bustling waiter had interrupted.

"Any way," he said, "one thing is certain—whatever they may have done in theory, they have done nothing in practice. The man is still in the hills. He seems likely to remain there. I shouldn't be astonished if he turned up with his two hundred and fifty in London and knocked at the door of the Bank of England. He's done things as daring. I was reading in the *Soir* yesterday that when he rode through Barcelona and robbed the banks there, the police lost their heads and looked on like fools. The people went on their knees to him. They thought he was the devil or something——"

"Must have seemed like an old friend," interjected the imperturbable Captain.

The genial Major struck a match and held it in his fingers.

"You don't write for the *Soir*, old man, do you?" he asked the novelist.

The general of cavalry was more serious.

"I read the *Soir*," he said quietly. "It's an extraordinary tale, I must confess. They tell me at headquarters that the Spanish Government is hushing it up. A man who came through from Irun last week declares that Biscay is almost in open rebellion. They seem to worship this Lorenzo, or whatever you call him. From what I understand, he performs miracles for their benefit—he appears fitfully, like a proper-minded ghost. On the very day he rode through Barcelona and robbed the banks there, the *Matin* sees him in Paris. How it's done, I don't pretend to say——"

"You'd better send Maskelyne out," exclaimed the Captain.

The General poured his brandy into his coffee and continued:—

"It would be interesting to me to know the truth, because I have so many Spanish friends. If some of them are to be believed, the North of Spain has gone mad—and the South of France is going that way. I hear of whole villages living in the fields. There was a panic as far north as Limoges the other day, and people were praying in the churches. That isn't any ordinary rebellion. You are not going to hunt down a man like that with a squadron of mounted police—you want a battalion of infantry and a head to lead it. If the thing goes on, this man will terrorize

Europe with two hundred and fifty ruffians and half a dozen galloping Maxim guns."

The genial Major laughed a boyish laugh of incredulity. The novelist drew his chair nearer to the General's and pursued his question.

"I'm not surprised that it's kept out of the papers," he said. "It doesn't suit any Government to let a story like that be told. What's more, it isn't altogether a Spanish affair. I hear that there are all sorts in the two hundred and fifty—Roumanians, Germans, Frenchmen, even Russians. Old cavalymen, of course, and devils to fight."

The General drained his cup.

"You leave out the Englishman," he said; "there's one at least among them."

The imperturbable Captain woke up, pricked by curiosity.

"By George," he said, and looked exceedingly wise. But the Major said very sharply,—

"No, I don't believe that—that's too much."

"It's true, though," persisted the General; "I can tell you the man's name. He had a commission in the 'Tenth' when I commanded. You remember Noel Falconer?"

"Good God!" exclaimed the Major. "Is he there?"

"We used to call him 'length without breadth,'" said the Captain; "a devilish good chap too—while his money lasted. He was a friend of mine before he went broke. I'd forgotten his name until you mentioned it."

The General went on with it.

"He has been with them—let's see, to-day is the second of November—that makes it six months. I hear that he left London for the first time in June.

He was back again for a fortnight or so in July. Since that time no one has seen him. The conclusion is obvious."

"That he will be strangled at Madrid," concluded the Major pleasantly.

"Or beheaded at La Roquette," suggested the novelist. "I prefer the guillotine. There's more colour in it—local and otherwise."

The Captain's mood turned to one of melancholy.

"Poor old Falconer!" he said. "I don't suppose any one cares a tinker's curse, but he was a good chap. He would give you his last shilling—even if he had to borrow it. A big-hearted man, too, who fell in love with every pretty woman he met. He was the most popular sub. in the 'Tenth' until he lost his cash. I wonder what the devil he is doing in that company."

"He's riding through the hills of Spain and wearing a white pelisse," answered the Major. "It must be pleasant while it lasts."

"How long do you give it, General?" asked the matter-of-fact and fancy novelist.

"Three months and the garrotte," was the answer.

They smoked in silence for a little while. Presently the imperturbable Captain rose languidly.

"Sorry, old man," he said, "I must be going. Don't let me break you up. As for your story, I don't believe a word of it."

The Major laughed.

"*Moi aussi*," he said.

But the novelist exclaimed,—

"Hark! what's that they're calling out in the street there?"

A "runner" was racing down Pall Mall with the

third edition of the *Globe* waved triumphantly above his head.

"'Ere ye h'are—great robbery at Bordeaux—one 'undred thousind pounds—speschul—mounted 'orsemen in the town—third edishun—*Globe*."

"I'll get that paper," said the novelist. "Are you coming, General?"

They left the club together.

But the Captain sauntered towards Piccadilly, muttering,—

"Poor old Falconer!"

CHAPTER XXXI

A WOMAN OF LOURDES

ON the evening of the day when the four men discussed Noel Falconer in the smoking-room of the great military club in Pall Mall, strange events were happening on the mountain road to Lourdes. To the scene of those events we will now turn.

A lonely highway—upon one hand a wood of pines singing to the soft breezes of the coming night; upon the other a precipice crowned with a great château—the château of Maître Roque, the banker of Bayonne, as all the world thereabouts could have told you. Upon the road there walked a woman whose tottering steps and shrivelled skin spoke of age and of infirmity. Supporting her with a gentle hand was a young man, whose firm step and contented face spoke of pleasure in his journey. Lurid crimson light fell upon the faces of the wayfarers, for the sun was sinking yonder over the city of miracles, and banks of heavy black cloud were rolling up from the darkening East. The travellers drew their scanty wraps about them, and encouraged one another with words of hope and promises of shelter presently. But while the youth spoke from his heart, it was plain the woman was rapidly losing her courage, and with courage her little store of strength.

“Do you not hear them, Jude?” she asked often;

"ay, but I do. God and the Virgin protect us both this night."

He answered her by putting his arm around her and drawing the beloved figure closer to him.

"Believe no such stories, dear mother," he said. "It is a tale out of Spain, a tale for children. What have the white horsemen to do with you and me? What could they do against the soldiers of France?"

The old woman trembled in his arms.

"They are not flesh and blood," she said, while her palsied hand shook so that she held her staff with difficulty. "They come out of the shadows. They ride over the world. Those who see them fall dead at their feet. Their swords are fire."

They walked on a little way, the darkness gathering quickly; but of a sudden the woman stood still and raised her staff, pointing upwards to the distant mountains.

"Hearken!" she wailed, as a crone mourning the dead; "I hear horsemen in the woods. Jesus, have pity!"

Had it been any one else but the mother he worshipped, the youth would have burst out laughing at the words; but he comforted her as he would have comforted a child.

"Dear mother, let me hold you with my arm. Have I not said that these are children's stories? Shall we believe them, you and I who trust in the good God?"

She did not answer him. Her mind was far away.

The strange wail was still upon her lips and she muttered it as they went:

"There are horsemen in the woods—horsemen in the woods."

The lad hid his impatience from her and half carried her towards the woodland path above which their chalet lay. When they turned the corner of the road, they could see the village below them and hear the bell of its church ringing as a tocsin. Mingling with the sounds were the wails of women and the cries of children. Men passed in and out of the houses carrying lanterns in their hands. The door of the church was open and many were kneeling before the lighted altar.

"It is the judgment," croaked the woman, "the judgment of God upon sinners. Did I not tell you there were horsemen in the woods? Oh, yonder, yonder, yonder!"

She continued to croak and to scream, and her voice failing her anon, she sank down to the dust and lay prone there. The man stood as one petrified. In the hollow of the road not a hundred paces from him there was a troop of white horsemen riding at a gallop toward the city of miracles. The swords glittered in the air as swords of pure gold; the crimson light fell upon their faces as a light from heaven; the thunder of hoofs was as a sound of cata-racts.

For a moment the youth stood spell-bound. The entrancing spectacle was to him as some vision from the world beyond the grave. He neither moved nor spoke. The words of his mother's prophesy were echoing in his ears. "They come out of the shadows. They ride over the world." He repeated the words even when clouds of dust half choked him, and the very earth quaked as the troop flashed by.

Silence fell again upon the hills; the pines swayed to the gentle breezes of night. There were no longer

cries in the affrighted village. The youth knelt by his mother's side and besought her to take courage.

She did not answer him, and when he laid his trembling hand upon her heart, he knew that she was dead.

CHAPTER XXXII

JULES LABARRE, BANKER

THE Villa Paillon, as every one within ten miles of it could tell you, is the property of Jules Labarre, the banker of Nice. Superbly placed under the shelter of the great Corniche Road, it stands so high above the blue waters of the Mediterranean that some have pretended to see the snow-caps of Corsica from its verandahs. Just below it to the left is the little town of Beaulieu, lying snug under the shelter of the vine-clad heights. The white peaks of the Maritime Alps stand, remote sentinels, at its rear; and so protect it from the mountain winds that in its garden there is all the odorous luxuriance of the tropics. Groves of oranges and of prickly pear; arbours roofed with the flat leaves of gigantic palms; orchids to bring Northern collectors upon their knees; whole woods of roses; splashing fountains and shading groves—these common things of the Riviera abound at the Villa Paillon. For Jules Labarre is a millionaire, as every banker in Europe remembers; and the Villa Paillon is his hobby.

There was a cold wind in London on the third of November in the year 1893—a biting wind, and a black fog such as every proper-minded citizen welcomes for the unique emblem of a Metropolitan winter. But at the Villa Paillon the sun shone and a warm

breeze decked out the tideless sea with a ripple of blue water and the brown sails of many ships. When night fell, it chanced to be a night of moonlight and of gentle waves tossing spindrift of gold upon the shores of Beaulieu and of Villefranche. Men loafed in flannels, and when the hour for changing came, they forgot their dust-coats. In the gardens of the Villa Paillon, women walked in their ball-dresses and even the doctors did not talk of chill.

Every one said that Labarre was a lucky man to have such a night for the first dance of his winter season. That festivity had been the talk of the Riviera for a month or more. Guests came to it from Nice, from Cannes, from Mentone, from Monaco. The great high road between Nice and Monaco was a cloud of dust almost as soon as the sun had set. Princes, paupers, duchesses with reputations, duchesses without reputations, *décaqués*, important personages travelling *incognito*, mysterious counts, notorious black-legs, all the *omnium gatherum* of the sea-coast towns was there.

Countless lamps lit up the odorous groves of the gardens and even the hills of vines behind them. Hungarian fiddlers thrashed their fiddles with the hysterical ferocity of a race born to fiddle. Counts without a shilling made love to princesses without sixpence—there was no arbour, no seat apart where love did not look love to eyes that looked again. Old Jules Labarre himself was in ecstasies of pride and gratification. *His* house! *his* guests! *his* money! And half the princes of the Mediterranean to bow and scrape to him. The rogues!—they would come to Nice to-morrow to ask for a loan. But he would see them at the devil first.

At eleven o'clock, when the dance was at its zenith, when the impetus of supper had quickened all heels and loosened all tongues, Thérèse, a pretty French girl, one of old Labarre's many poor relations, left the ball-room on the arm of the young Prince of Savone and led him abstractedly to a place in a grove of vines so far from the house that none but one familiar with the Villa Paillon would have discovered it. There she found a little summer-house; and when her partner had seated himself very close to her side, she began to remember that the place was very lonely and that she had no business to be there at all.

"*Je vous en veux*," she exclaimed coquettishly; "it is your fault, Prince. My uncle will be coming to look for me presently—and then!"

He squeezed her hand and assumed a look of one who would lay down his life for her.

"*Du courage*, pretty Thérèse—your uncle is at the supper-table. He will not come here while I am with you. He would think that I might take advantage of the opportunity to borrow a thousand francs. *Pas si bête*—he will not come."

She sighed and bent her head, so that her little curls were kissing his cheek.

"You are all very unkind to Uncle Jules," she said simply, "and yet you come to his house."

The man let his hand steal furtively about her waist, and then answered her.

"*Du tout*—we are not unkind at all. It is he who is unkind to us. There is not one of us who does not desire closer relations with him. I offered him my autograph many times—he refuses it, he insults me."

"Your autograph upon a cheque, Prince?"

"Certainly it was upon a cheque. He could have handed it down from generation to generation, the cheque of the Prince of Savone. It would have been the pride of his house. Not so—he refuses it; he disdains the honour! Do I not love him as a brother—and everything in this house! Am I not here now to protest my love for the beautiful Thérèse?"

She smiled a little sadly.

"She does not refuse your autograph——"

"It is written upon her heart—*hein*, my pretty one?"

A long pause, a silence far sweeter than words, ensued. When he released her from his strong arms, she remembered that it became her to protest.

"How shall I go back?—my cheeks are on fire," she said; "every one will notice it. I am ashamed of you, Prince."

"We will not go back," he exclaimed heroically. "There is nothing *là bas* we care for. And your uncle will be happier when he is not counting the glasses of champagne I drink. *Sapristi!* if we should never go back, my Thérèse. If we could work miracles and say 'Paris,' as the old man with the carpet used to say 'Bagdad.' What a thing that would be—if we had the purse which was never empty and the flying carpet which was never tired."

"But we have not," she replied, in her matter-of-fact appreciation of the *status quo*, "and they are playing the Lancers. You must blame the age. What will my partner say?"

"He will call me out at dawn—I shall be on the road to Florence then. Is it not cruel, *ma vie*?—a little month of happiness here and then no more Thérèse—nothing but the barracks, and the bugle, and the

life I hate. Do you not forgive me for being sad to-night?"

She raised her pretty face to his and kissed his lips; but almost in the act a cry escaped her, and she sprang to her feet. For a man, who wore a kepis and a loose cloak, and carried a rifle in his hand, stood at the door of the summer-house, watching them with obvious amusement.

"*Restez, restez, monsieur et mademoiselle,*" he said, doffing his hat to them with a great show of courtesy; "there is no need to trouble yourselves. It is not for you that we are come. I beg you continue."

The Prince of Savone put out his hand and drew Thérèse close to him. He could feel her trembling as he held her.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked the man, seeing that he did not move from the doorway of the harbour. At the same moment the music in the distant ball-room ceased discordantly and loud cries of fear succeeded to it.

"You will learn that presently," said the man, still courteously. "If you care to return to the house, the way is open to you, monsieur. But if you take my advice, you will remain where you are—and continue to talk to mademoiselle."

He spoke pleasantly enough, but the way he held his rifle was significant—as much as to say, "I advise, but there is the gun for those who differ from me." Meanwhile, the cries in the ball-room of the house continued, and were accompanied by the sound of footsteps on the paths about the summer-house. Figures were to be seen between the groves, but whenever a figure moved toward the gate of the garden, there a cloaked man appeared and cried, "Halt."

"Great God!" cried the Prince, as the truth began to dawn upon him, "what does it mean?—is the house surrounded, then?"

"As you say, monsieur, the house is surrounded. But we shall respect its guests so long as we are respected. If your host is reasonable, there will be no trouble. If not——"

He handled his rifle so menacingly that his meaning was not to be misunderstood. The two he addressed stood hand in hand, speechless with amazement. When the Prince found his tongue, it was to express his incredulity.

"Pah!" he said, "there are no brigands in France now-a-days. Why play the fool with us, *mon ami*?"

"Because I have nothing else to do, monsieur. *Basta*—it is a pleasant occupation when you are well paid for it, as old Jules will pay us to-night. You should not lose that play, *mes enfants*. It is going on now in the ball-room yonder."

The invitation awakened their curiosity. Even the man who had jested at old Labarre's parsimony was not willing to run away from him in a moment of danger. As for Thérèse, she released her lover's hand almost abruptly, and ran back to the house. "I must see my uncle," she said. Not for an instant did she understand why the music had ceased discordantly, or why the man with the rifle had come to the summer-house. It was some mistake—some surprise planned by the soldiers from Villefranch. When the Prince next saw her she was standing at her uncle's side in the ball-room—perhaps the one woman in that terror-stricken company capable of thought or action.

"What does it mean? what has happened? who are these men?"

He asked the question of those who stood, as amazed as he was, at the windows of the room. They replied with shrugs of the shoulders or angry exclamations; but one man, the editor of an Italian paper published at Monaco, was more wise.

"They are the friends of the Spanish rebel Lorenzo, who have taken it into their heads to dance in the house of old Labarre. I am sure of it, monsieur. They looted the bank of Maître Simon at Tangier ten days ago. When they pillaged the château of Baron Malot at Narbonne, they chose an occasion such as this. Who else should it be? We have done with bandits in France. There is only one brigand in Europe now, and he is the king of them all. He fights with Maxim guns; you will see that he has one for our amusement to-night."

He pointed to a place upon the verandah where there stood a Maxim mounted upon a light galloping carriage. It was so placed that it covered the ball-room and could have filled it with dead in ten minutes.

"You see," said the Italian, "this is no brigand out of Corsica upon a week's furlough. It is a siege, monsieur. Every gate is closed; there are armed men on the high road yonder. If I were in Labarre's shoes, I would pay up and have done with it. We could go on with our dancing then."

The Prince looked at the speaker contemptuously.

"Pah!" he exclaimed; "if it were my house I would not pay a franc."

Thus on the veranda without. Within the house, it was another scene. The great ball-room was full of the old guests and the new. Women lay fainting in the arms of men with whom they had just danced.

Strong men stood sullen and silent before the rifles which covered them. Banks of glorious white flowers, of arum lilies, of tuberoses, of gardenias, were now trodden heaps of dirty leaves. The musicians stood up with their instruments still in their hands. Side by side were the old guests and the new—the jewelled women, the men in their glittering uniforms, the strange company, come God knew whence, but all wearing the jacket and kepis of the French chasseur. Fifty of these strangers there were, said some; others said a hundred. People marvelled that their leader was a mere boy. They heard his name, “Yoli,” called out by one whom he answered as “St. Cyr.” Perchance the women were half-won by the effrontery with which he faced the master of the house and stated his conditions.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, with a gaiety delightful to see, “please do not concern yourselves. My business is with Jules Labarre.”

The trembling banker stepped forward. Thérèse, his niece, held his hand. “They dare not hurt you, dearest uncle,” she whispered; “they only want money.”

“I am Jules Labarre,” he said, taking courage at her words, “what is your business with me?”

The lieutenant, “Yoli,” surveyed him with a pitying amusement.

“*Cré nom*,” he exclaimed jestingly; “do not tremble for your bank-notes, old man. We will take some of them away just now, and then you will not be so anxious. Be assured, monsieur, you are contributing to an excellent cause—the good government of Spain, and the success of one who will shortly be the King of Spain. You have heard of Lorenzo of Arragon?

Very well, I am sent here to demand in his name two hundred and fifty thousand francs of you—to be paid in gold in this room.”

The banker laughed ironically.

“You had better ask a million,” he said quietly; “there would be as much chance of your getting it.”

Yoli joined in the laugh. The guests, finding no personal danger to themselves, took courage and were all ears for the discussion.

“I obey my instructions,” continued the lieutenant quietly, “two hundred and fifty thousand francs—or (and here he looked round the room pleasantly) the jewels of your guests, monsieur.”

Labarre drew back with an oath. The women in the room began hastily to cover up their diamonds with their wraps, even to slip the pendants and rings in their pockets.

“Come,” said Labarre, “has not the joke gone far enough, monsieur? Do you think that I am to be frightened in this way when there are soldiers in the town below and police in the villages? I will not give a sou. What is more, if you do not leave this house in five minutes my men shall horsewhip you from the gates. You hear me? Then take yourselves off while you have the chance.”

The lieutenant replied with a shout of laughter, in which others of the troop joined.

“I hear you, monsieur,” he said, very politely; “you must now hear me. If you do not consent to my conditions, also in five minutes’ time, I must carry out my instructions. I should be sorry to do that, Monsieur Labarre, for really this seems to be a very pleasant party. Come, be sensible. It is true that there are soldiers in the town of Villefranche, but they

will not hear you, however loud you squeal. As for your police—I have left three of them in the ditch on my way here. It would be a grief to me, monsieur, to find you foolish—I protest it from my heart.”

He acted his part to perfection. The scene was altogether one of comedy. It was at its height when a young hussar, resenting the insult to his host, stepped up to the lieutenant and struck him on the cheek.

“Coward,” he said, “to threaten women. That is how the soldiers of Villefranche answer you.”

The lieutenant, Yoli, continued to laugh.

“Upon my word,” he said gaily, “you are a very foolish fellow.”

The hussar clenched his hands and stamped with rage at the taunt.

“Cowards,” he repeated, “there is not a brave man among you.”

The lieutenant, who now kept his temper with an effort, made a signal to one of the troopers at his side.

“Take that child to the nursery,” he said peremptorily.

The man addressed, a burly German from Dresden, stepped forward and picked up the boy hussar as if he had been a baby. Tucking him under his arm, and addressing him in those maternal exhortations which go to make the language of the nursery, he carried him from the room and tossed him to another trooper at the door.

“Hush, hush, little man—here is the pap coming,” he said.

The scene was so unexpected that even the panic-stricken women could laugh at it. Almost it convinced Labarre that he was, after all, the victim of

some of the merry soldiers of Nice ; but just when he was pluming himself upon this and finding an unexpected store of courage, the lieutenant turned brusquely to him and reiterated his demands in the tone of one who means to have an answer.

"For the last time, Monsieur Labarre," he said, "'yes' or 'no' before I carry out my instructions."

Thérèse, clinging to her uncle's arm, whispered,—

"Promise, promise ; you can send for the soldiers when he has gone."

But Labarre said,—

"It is impossible—I have not the money here ; how could I pay you ?"

"In the jewels which your safe contains, monsieur!"

Labarre groaned.

"Oh, my God!" he said, "what does it mean—what does it mean?"

"*Arrivons*," exclaimed the lieutenant angrily, "the time is up, monsieur. Since you refuse my request, I must now make it to your guests. And first to the Baroness de Latude here, whose diamonds, upon my word, are worthy of a pretty lady."

The baroness addressed, a graceful woman with enough of her youth left to regret that part of it which was spent, turned on Labarre like a tiger.

"It is a trap," she said ; "you brought me here for this."

"He shall answer to me," chimed in her fat husband, in an unusual fit of heroism, though he had not the smallest idea of fighting any one.

This cry of protest, a selfish cry altogether, was soon imitated. Women became hysterical again or fainted when the troopers approached them. Some snatched jewels from their throats and flung them at

the lieutenant's feet. Others ran to Labarre and declared that it was his work. He, meanwhile, stood as one dazed ; he scarce heard the fervent appeals of the girl who stood at his side.

"Pay them, uncle ; you cannot suffer this shame."

"I will not pay," he retorted again and again ; "why should I? Are there not soldiers in Ville-franche?"

The lieutenant, Yoli, heard him out and then gave the orders for which his men were waiting.

"Strip the house !" he cried ; "shoot any man who interferes with you !"

As the troopers moved to their work, panic uncontrollable seized upon the company. Many tried to reach the gardens by the long French windows above the verandas, but troopers beat them back with the butts of their rifles. Others ran wildly to and fro, clasping their jewels in their hands. Ornaments were overturned ; great palms lay crushing their leaves, and the mould from their pots soiled the pretty white shoes of the women. Entreaties, screams, the oaths of men added to the uproar. Soon blows were given and taken. Some one fired his rifle and sulphurous smoke filled the room. Labarre, himself, was heard at last crying,—

"Cease, cease, for God's sake ! I will pay you the money."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GREAT BOISSON

IT was daybreak before the soldiers from Villefranche and Beaulieu reached the Villa Paillon. They came at the gallop to hear as strange a story as ever was told upon the Corniche Road. But those they sought for had long vanished in the shadows of the night.

"To the East—they are gone to the East," cried some of the many curious villagers now gathered at Labarre's gate. Others said, "It was to the mountains—to the frontier, messieurs." Others again cried: "You must seek them on the sea—they will be Corsican bandits. Who knows—it may even be the great Giovanni himself."

The captain of the troop heard all stories and believed none.

"Come," he said, "there are no brigands in France now-a-days, Monsieur Labarre. Some one has been hoaxing you. You had better send for the police—this is not my work."

Labarre answered him with an oath. Then he locked himself in his study to watch his guests who had delayed their departure until the sun began to flame upon the snow-caps of the distant mountains. Now that dawn had come they hastened away to their homes. It was pitiful to see the white faces of

the women, as the morning light fell upon them ; more pitiful still to pass through the empty rooms, and to look upon the trampled flowers and the broken mirrors, and the cabinets of price which the rifle butts had clubbed open. Before such sights, the apathy of the troops was difficult to explain. It meant, in plain words, that they did not understand the things they saw. Brigands in France—a tale for children ! When the great Boisson, the detective from Marseilles, came up to the villa presently he would laugh at it with them.

Boisson drove up from Villefranche at eight o'clock. He passed through the wrecked rooms quickly, noting everything but recording little. To Labarre he said,—

“ I can promise nothing, monsieur. If it is as I think, this is no work for the police of France, but for her soldiers. I will trouble you to describe for me once more the man who led the gang. You would know him again ? ”

“ In ten thousand. And I know his name—they called him Yoli ; and a younger man with him was addressed as Saint Cyr. ”

Boisson turned to his subordinate, a sleek man with a tremendous capacity for listening.

“ Saint Cyr—Saint Cyr,” he said ; “ is that a name known to you, Clairville ? ”

The subordinate shook his head.

“ There is a Saint Cyr at Foix,” he replied, “ but it cannot be the same man. They raided his château when they stopped the mail to Narbonne. ”

“ What ! ” interrupted Labarre, “ do you think that I have had a visit from the Spanish brigands, then ? ”

“ I am sure of it, monsieur. ”

“ Then I am lucky to have saved my neck ! ”

"Exceedingly lucky," said the great Boisson.

"But if the man is in France, cannot you lay hands on him? Are two hundred and fifty Spanish robbers to defy our army?"

"They have done it so far. Possibly they will do it again. When somebody points out to us their hiding-place, we shall begin to hope. *Au revoir*, monsieur; I must be on the road again."

"You are fools all, and incapable!" cried the angry banker; "one man has made a laughing-stock of all the police in Europe."

The great Boisson ignored the reflection. Bowing to Labarre curtly, he entered his carriage and was driven rapidly towards Beaulieu. A little way from the village he met a horseman, and the carriage was stopped, that the two might talk.

"Well," he said, "is there any news of a steamer?"

"None, monsieur. There was a ship off Villefranche this morning before dawn, but she proved to be an Italian gunboat."

"And her name?"

"*San Marco*."

"Was she searched?"

"She was not, monsieur."

"Fools—the man we seek was on board that ship."

He ordered them to turn the horses and to gallop back to Nice.

"We must not lose a moment," he said to the sleek subordinate; "that gunboat was their yacht disguised; they will be in Spain in thirty hours. Read me the gipsy girl's letter again."

"The letter from the girl, Giralda?"

"Of course; there is no other."

The letter was one of eight words.

"The man you seek will be at Hyères," it said.

"You see," said the sleek subordinate triumphantly, "she tells us lies."

"Not so," answered his chief; "the plans must have been altered. I shall start for Torla to-day."

"To hear more lies."

"Perhaps—but they will help me to catch this Spanish robber, and his capture spells a hundred thousand francs, Clairville. I believe in the gipsy woman. She has done her best—and, after all, Hyères is very near to Beaulieu."

"Near enough to make fools of us. For myself, I do not believe your gipsy girl at all. You should try the hunchback. He is in the mountains. If I can read a man's face, there is one for our money."

The great Boisson was not listening, however. He had fallen into a reverie, from which he did not awake until the carriage clattered up to the door of the Hôtel Helder in Nice.

"I would give a thousand francs to know the destination of the steamer, *San Marco*," he said as he entered the hotel.

But the sleek subordinate shrugged his shoulders.

"If you would ask the hunchback, Ximeno, he would tell you," was his reply.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MESSENGERS FROM THE HILLS

ON the evening of the day when the great Boisson drove from the Villa Paillon to Nice, Isabella de Gavarnie sat at a window of her house near the cathedral close of the Spanish town of Zaragoza. It was an old house, one of many in a narrow street which the Moors had built and the masters of later Arragonese had decorated. Superbly carved soffits and rafters, magnificent cornices were the glory of its exterior; but within it spoke of the nineteenth century and of a woman of taste and culture. The oddity of environment, the *cinque cento* streets about, the knick-knacks from Paris and from London abounding in its great drawing-room were half the charm of the Casa Giafer, as every one in Zaragoza called it.

But for the woman who owned the house there was more in it than any charm of decoration or of architecture. For it was a home for her among her own people; a home at the foot of the mountains which her forefathers had won and wherein her own childhood had been spent. She could look from its windows across the plains of her own Arragon to those wooded hills whereon her kinsmen had shed their blood that Spain might be free. She could remember in the silence of that Moorish house, where every beam told its tale of the ages of Spain's glory, that her country

might yet be free again, and that she might take her part in a work so glorious.

This love of fatherland, this ambition for it, had been the love and the ambition of her life. At one time she had thought it might be an unexacting love, demanding nothing which she could not give freely. But the day had come at last when she must know the truth. One name now was ever in her ears—the name of the man sent by destiny to her house in London, and by her sent to help Spain in the hour of deliverance. If she had been asked to say why this was, or to tell simply to what quality Noel Falconer owed this mastery of her mind and thought, she would have been unable to answer.

Others reading her heart better would have said that the personal courage of the man, his transparent honesty, his magnificent physique—the contrast between him and the Spaniards who hedged her life about—gave the key to the enigma.

Such as Noel Falconer was, she felt that her own forefathers must have been. And beyond this was that affinity, that personal magnetism which no logic explains, but which men, and women too, call love—that desire for one and one only, to the exclusion of all else, of ambition, of gain, sometimes even of life.

Isabella had realized this love, perhaps, when she left London at the moment of its consummation and went again among her own people. But her woman's will was a will of iron. Prevailing even above the sensuous pleasure with which the companionship of Noel Falconer filled her was the memory of her father's words—"For Spain and the Faith." As he had lived and died for his country, so might she, a woman. The appeal of the rebel Lorenzo—the appeal

to the Queen of Arragon to return to the hills and light the beacon fires—was as a clarion note ringing through Europe to summon her.

“In your name they hope; for your name they will die—will you leave them at the hour of victory?” he had written. Her answer had been to quit London on that very day; to seek out her old house in Zaragoza; to wait the news that the hillmen were in arms and that the victory was won. But the days passed and the news was still lacking. Messengers rode in from the mountains, and their cry was always the same—“We wait for the master, but he does not come.” Priests who knew the people shook their heads and said, “They are ready; this is the hour, he should strike now.”

Newspapers told of the appearance of the rebels and of their deeds in many countries—how that the name of their chief had become a terror to Europe; but promised always his speedy arrest and execution. The rare letters from Noel Falconer, which were smuggled into the Casa Giafer, were full of gloom and foreboding. The woman read them and asked herself if the sacrifice was to be unavailing, after all. But for her belief in the genius of him who had been her father’s friend, Lorenzo the Magnificent, she would still have her lover at her side. But now——!

Sadly she carried the last of Noel’s letters to the window and looked out upon the distant mountains. It seemed to her that the figure of death winged above them, and, winging, bore the body of her lover in his arms.

The letter bore the date of the last day of October. It had been posted from the Island of Majorca, and had travelled slowly, as does all the world in Spain. She

had read it ten times already, but she read it once again as she turned from the window and lit the candles upon her little satin-wood writing-table. The words upon the paper were as notes for her ears; her imagination showed her Noel in the act of writing them. His lips had sealed the letter, she thought.

“OFF LA PUEBLA,

“October 31st, 1893.

“There is a messenger to-day, dear Isabella, at La Puebla, who brings me some little news of you and of my letters. It had been kinder if he had brought also some message from your own lips, the message I have waited for so long. What shall I think of your silence?

“You are silent, and yet I write to you! What logic may explain that enigma? Is it because I read your silence aright? Is it because I know that even here in the bay of this desolate island your eyes follow me and your heart goes with me? God made our friendship. He alone shall end it.

“But *à quoi bon*? I am writing of myself—and you, you are all ears for that other news—of us, and of our yacht, and of him we follow, God knows whither or why. To-day we are in the little bay of Alcudia. We fly the English flag; we pass as an English ship. Our achievements deserve to be written in the history of the world—or should it be of the prison? To-morrow we sail for Beaulieu disguised as an Italian gun-boat. Our work is to pillage the villa of old Jules Labarre, the banker of Nice. A glorious work, do you say, worthy of the heaven-born genius who is to save Spain, of the man for whom you—but again, *à quoi bon*? The day for the reckoning is not yet.

“Spain waits indeed and will wait. You at Zaragoza

ask me why no message comes. I will tell you in a word. We have become robbers for the sake of robbing. What we did at first for the good of your country, we do now for the good of ourselves. Lorenzo cannot control these instincts. They master him. His own teaching is making cut-purses of his best men. 'To-morrow we will return and the revolution will begin.' I hear that said every morning. I shall hear it until the police of France lay hands upon us and a mob at the gates of La Roquette tells all the city that Monsieur de Paris is there. It can end no other way. The great cataclysm—it will burst, it must burst before the year has run. And God help those who breast the waters.

"And so I wait, dear Isabella, as the clouds gather and the horizon darkens. Can it be that there will be blue sky beyond? Can it be that the sun will shine upon us both in the years to come? I dare not think it. There is no light anywhere. The voice I wait for does not answer me. Yet once it spake and for ever will be remembered.

"P.S.—Ximeno, the hunchback, left here yesterday and has gone to Madrid. If you have any opportunity, watch this fellow. I do not trust him."

Isabella read the letter, the candle light striking up upon her tear-stained face. Many idols were shattered as she read—the idol of a new Spain, the idol of an army new-born, the idol of a strong man's victories. She thought of herself in that moment as of a woman fighting for a nation and finding no ally. She had given all—even her surpassing love. Would they give nothing?

A low knock upon the door of her room aroused her

from the reverie. She thrust the letter into a drawer, and rose quickly to face the new-comer. When she saw that the visitor was a young girl, her embarrassment passed, and she uttered a word of warm welcome.

"It is little Giralda from the hills."

The gipsy girl, who was dressed in a short skirt of dark green cloth, with a tight-fitting bodice of the same colour, and a Tyrolean hat stuck jauntily upon her pretty fair hair, might have been a little English horsewoman returned home from a long gallop. Her cheeks were rosy with the mountain winds, her eyes sparkled with youth and health; but there was that in her manner which betrayed her earnestness and haste. Advancing timidly into the room, she looked about her quickly, furtively. The dust of the Spanish road was still upon her dress.

"Are you alone, señora?" she asked. "Can you speak to me?"

Isabella drew her to the light with both hands.

"I was never more alone, child," she said. "It is good of you to come—and with news from Torla, I am sure."

"There is grave news, señora. I have ridden at the gallop to tell you. Police are in the hills; General Goya is at Jaca; the soldiers come all day. We sleep to their music; they are in every house. And the master has left us; there is none to lead us. They have forsaken us in the great hour. Ah! *Dios*, that I should see the day when the people would cry for the White Hussars and the hills would be empty. It is the end, señora. You alone are left to us, and you are silent."

Isabella looked at her in astonishment. The excite-

ment which possessed the gipsy girl was as some flood of passion sweeping her very heart. She spoke imploringly, and, when her message was delivered, she waited as though the answer were of moment rather to herself than to Spain.

"You will speak the word, señora; you will not leave us alone?" she repeated; and her attitude was that of some little princess of the mountains at the feet of her queen.

Isabella answered her by striking a gong, and bidding her servant to bring wine and food to the room.

"You must eat, child," she commanded sympathetically. "We will talk of all this to-morrow."

In her heart, perhaps, she dreaded to ask, or to be told, that one word of hers would bring the White Hussars to Arragon again. The shaming truth that this child was stronger than she, and could make the sacrifice which she herself turned from, was a truth bitter to realize. She knew that little Giralda loved Lorenzo more than life. Yet the peasant girl could come to her and say: "You alone can bring him back; he will come for you." Spain, she thought, had no truer friend.

"We will talk of this to-morrow," she continued, that she might hide these truths from herself; "to-night you must sleep and forget the mountains."

Giralda shook her head sadly.

"They wait for me—I must not delay," she pleaded earnestly. "Ah, señora, if I could go to them and say, The word is spoken and he will come back. How the sun would shine for them to-morrow!"

Isabella laid a hand kindly upon the little arm.

"And yet you love him, child. Does a woman sacrifice her love for her country?"

"Señora, our father did."

She spoke in a low voice, as though fearing her own words. But Isabella drew back from her, and all the colour left her face.

"Our father! child," she exclaimed.

Giralda stood in the aureola of light and answered as though this was the proudest moment of her life.

"I am the daughter of Philip of Gavarnie. He married my mother, an Englishwoman in the Brazils, after they banished him. You are not angry with me, señora?"

Isabella stood motionless. She stood like some majestic statue which the wan light beautified. Before she spoke again she drew the trembling child close to her arms.

* * * * *

At a late hour that night a horseman left Zaragoza with a secret letter to be carried secretly to the island of Majorca. The devotion of two women wrote it; love of country, asking the very heart's life of those who loved, put seal and sign to it.

"Arragon awaits you," the letter said; "when the victory is won I will be your wife."

And to that letter Isabella set her name, with trembling hand.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SLEEK SUBORDINATE DRINKS CHIANTI

THE sleek subordinate Clairville, the silent aide-de-camp of the great Boisson, the master policeman of Marseilles, sat in the courtyard of the Hôtel de l'Europe above Beaulieu. He had three companions, and he drank their chianti with obliging readiness. Though it was December, the sun shone warmly on the blue Mediterranean. There was a scent of orange blossom in the air; roses climbed and budded in the glass-roofed courtyard; the sky was without cloud—the world of the South without an atmospheric care.

The sleek subordinate needed little to make him happy. When he could drink wine at other people's expense, and smoke cigars from other people's cases, his worldly needs were few. But if, in addition to such gifts of life as these, he might listen to abuse of his chief, the great Boisson, then he asked nothing more. On this particular day, in the courtyard of the Hôtel de l'Europe, his measure of happiness was heaped up and overflowing, for the talk had turned upon the robbery at old Labarre's and the impotence of the great Boisson—but, above all, on the fine discernment of the sleek subordinate himself, who, if the fat host of the hotel were to be believed, would have had the Spanish brigand under lock and key a month ago but for the folly of his superiors.

"A fig for the great Boisson!" said the fat host,

nerved by many a glass of chianti to the astounding blasphemy. "What has he done, messieurs? Is the Spaniard caught; has his Excellency got his jewels back? Are we sure that the robbers will not come this way again? A fig for the great Boisson! My son Alphonse shall do better. He can ride in a carriage; he can look wise; he can crack his fingers so; he can swear all the oaths—that is the great Boisson! A fig for him!"

The sleek subordinate took advantage of the fat host's eloquence to help himself to another glass of chianti. It was not for him to depreciate the great Boisson! Not at all. He could only drink the wine cunningly, and nod his head—a clever nod which might mean "yes" and might mean "no," and might be but the flavour of the wine upon the tongue.

"Wait," he said, by-and-by, when the glass was empty; "we shall see what we shall see."

The company was not impressed by so profound a remark. The fat host snapped his fingers scornfully; the little hussar from Villefranche, the one who had been carried out of the room when the Villa Paillon was robbed, laughed indecorously; Monsieur Michel, Labarre's steward, shook his head despondingly.

"We have waited a long time, Monsieur Clairville," said the steward, with a melancholy sigh.

"Patience," exclaimed the sleek subordinate; "a little patience, Monsieur Michel. Is not my master busy? If you will but wait."

"Until the day of judgment," chimed in the valiant hussar, "wait until the great trumpet blows, and you will see Lorenzo and your master's jewels. Pah! I have no patience. Give me a troop and I will hunt the man down in a week."

The fat host made a g esture of despair.

"Now if it were our friend, Clairville, here," he said, pointing to the sleek subordinate, and catching him in the act of filling his glass again, "we should go to bed and sleep then. Can we do so now? I say, no, messieurs. Will not the fox come back to the farm? There are many farms between Nice and Monaco—big farms and little farms. The Spaniard will come again; he will rob another villa; the great Boisson will come; he will ride in a carriage, he will swear all the oaths. And he will do—nothing. Oh, the great Boisson!"

The sleek subordinate swelled at the compliment. He blew clouds of smoke from his thin lips, and assumed an air of vast importance.

"There is, messieurs," he exclaimed, "an Italian proverb which says, 'In too much controversy the truth is lost.' Let us not lose the truth, as others have lost it."

"Bravo!" repeated the fat host; "as others have lost it—the great Boisson, for instance."

"I am not infallible, messieurs," continued the sleek subordinate very humbly. "I have my faults. I am not superior to the human race. Heaven forbid that I should despise the common clay. Your weaknesses are my weaknesses."

The host raised his hands in depreciation, but the speaker continued quickly,—

"Claiming nothing that any other might not claim, I may yet know what I know. You will not dispute that, Monsieur Michel?"

"I dispute nothing, monsieur," replied the steward meekly; "I was not sent into the world to dispute."

The sleek subordinate sipped his wine and nodded his head again.

"All being agreed," he said, "we come to the point. You ask me where the Spaniard is to-day. I will tell you. He is in Paris."

The three bent forward to hear news so momentous. At the same instant a mounted messenger came clattering into the courtyard with a telegram.

"Monsieur Clairville! Monsieur Clairville! a dispatch from Marseilles!" he bawled.

The sleek subordinate sprang to his feet and tore open the envelope. His manner changed in a moment. A beast seeking prey could not have been more alert.

"Good God!" he cried, a moment later, as he stood with the paper fluttering in his hand, "the rebels are at Monaco, and Lorenzo is with them!"

Swiftly the news went from street to street and house to house. Mounted men were soon to be observed on the great road to Monte Carlo. Hussars came through Beaulieu at a gallop. The sleek subordinate was whirled from the Hôtel de l'Europe in the best carriage the fat host possessed. Men lost speech when trying to speak of daring so insurpassable. The priest of Beaulieu stood upon the steps of his house encouraging the police.

"There are five millions of money in the bank there!" he cried. "For God's sake, hasten!"

* * * * *

It was daybreak when the sleek subordinate returned to his hotel to tell the dismal story.

"Oh, the great Boisson!" he said, wringing his hands; "the robbery was yesterday. We were twelve hours too late."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SPANIARD IS HERE

DELAVIGNE, the chief of the police of the town of Monaco, sat at his writing-desk in the little office by the harbour road. His report for the day lay before him, and he surveyed it with content. For twenty hours there had been no case of suicide at Monte Carlo. Blacklegs from Paris, come to rob the gamblers, were all under lock and key. *Décavés*, penniless counts, swindling duchesses, notorious pick-pockets were duly honoured with a line upon Delavigne's list. The chief of the police had a right indisputable to beam upon all the world. Moreover, he had just dined.

"The town is quiet," wrote the chief of the police. It was the evening before the sleek subordinate, Clairville, had driven furiously to Monaco from the Hôtel de l'Europe, a few miles down the coast. There was no blot upon the chief's serenity. He examined his handiwork admiringly, and was still occupied in so satisfactory an employment when some one knocked at his door.

"*Entrez donc*," he cried, assuming that fierce attitude with which he confronted all evil-doers—notoriously ruined gamblers. When, however, he discovered that his visitor was only Maître Roubac, the harbour-master of Monaco, his face relaxed and he held out his hand cheerfully.

"So it is you, Roubac; and what the devil do you want now, at dinner-time?"

Maitre Roubac was a red-faced sailor with a voice that could be heard across the mountains. He had not the readiness of the ferret-eyed policeman; but there was plenty of common sense in his little round head; and he refused at all times to be hustled.

"What do I want, Delavigne? Well, I might want many things—a cigar and a glass of wine, for instance."

The chief of the police pushed his report away, and called one of his assistants to go and get a bottle of red wine. He knew well enough that old Roubac had not come to the office merely to gossip. His keen ear was open already. There was something astir, and he would hear of it presently. When they had smoked a little while, he ventured a question.

"You are busy, Roubac; you have many ships in the harbour?"

Roubac looked at the end of his cigar curiously.

"There are ships, Delavigne, and ships," he replied enigmatically. "I could harbour more; I could send some away and not be sorry. The English ship, for instance!"

Delavigne was up in a minute.

"How—the yacht of the Captain Falconer—you suspect her? Why did you not tell me? She has been in since four o'clock. What have you seen to make you suspicious?"

Roubac looked embarrassed.

"I have seen nothing—heard nothing. It's just in my head here. I can't explain it, but there it is. Ever since that yacht dropped anchor, I've been telling myself what a funny thing it would be if the Spanish lot were on board her."

Delavigne turned as white as a sheet.

"Good God!" he cried, half rising, "the Spaniard here in Monte Carlo!" A moment later he almost shouted,—

"But I know that he is not. I had a telegram this morning from Boisson of Marseilles. The Spaniard was seen in Paris yesterday. How could he be in Monaco to-day?"

Maître Roubac did not attempt to answer the question. He smoked silently. He was ashamed of his own suspicions, yet clung to them. The chief of the police, meanwhile, paced the room as one whose brain is on fire with his own thoughts. He wished to laugh at the old sailor, but could not do so.

"Come," exclaimed the chief, stopping suddenly in his agitated walk, "what do the Customs say? They have been aboard. They return the report that this is the pleasure yacht of an English gentleman. Do you differ from them, Maître Roubac? have you seen things which they have not seen?"

Maître Roubac shrugged his shoulders.

"I have seen nothing," he said doggedly; "it is an English yacht, of course—the yacht of Captain Falconer. There are two hundred men aboard, and they are his friends. I have seen them myself. They come from all countries. There are Spaniards, Roumanians, Germans, Russians. He entertains them all—*quel homme!* Can that be the yacht of the great Spaniard, *mon ami?* Have we not here an army of one hundred and twenty-six men, with eighty detectives at the Casino, and your gendarmes? Would any man be fool enough to think that he could ruin the bank at Monte Carlo. Pah! a madman's idea!"

Delavigne sat down again.

"And yet it is your idea, my friend?" he said pointedly.

Roubac knocked the ashes from his cigar. He answered as one speaking his own thoughts to an empty room.

"He has done much—he will do more. Why should he not come to Monte Carlo? There are millions in the Casino. Our army is a name. He could pillage the town and be away before France sent us help. Why should he not be here?"

Delavigne wiped his forehead and drank a deep draught of wine.

"Because he is in Paris, Maître Roubac. Does not Boisson say so? There is his telegram on the table."

He had scarcely spoken the words when the boom of a great gun from the castle upon the hill shook the windows of the little office, and made the glasses tremble. As the two men sprang to their feet to ask what the meaning of the gun was, a terrified gendarme, with torn uniform and blackened tunic, burst into the room, and stood gasping incoherently before them.

"The Spaniard is here!" he cried wildly; "there are two hundred armed men in the Casino, my chief. They have shot Sergeant Grève—they are burning the town. Oh! for God's sake come!"

Delavigne and Roubac rushed from the office together. Bugles were blowing then in the streets of Monaco. Horsemen were dashing up and down calling for the guard. At the door of the post-office a man cried incessantly,—

"The wires are cut! the wires are cut!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE GREAT PANIC

MONACO, as all the world knows now-a-days, is a little principality under the protection of France. Owned for more than nine hundred years by the Grimaldi family, its present sovereign is Prince Albert, whose English wife, Lady Mary Hamilton, bore him one son, Louis. Entirely independent, the little state has an army of one hundred and twenty-six French veterans, a well-organized police force, and eighty detectives to protect the great gambling saloon which is the source of its wealth. Its territory, eight square miles in all, consists of a narrow strip of coast-land, at one end of which there is a great rocky promontory, and the castle of Prince Albert; at the other, a hill of less altitude, upon which the Casino is built. Thus there are two towns together, Monaco itself and Monte Carlo, linked by a good carriage road, and giving a home to some fourteen thousand people.

Until the memorable year when the Spaniard came there, it had occurred to no one that this principality was open to the dangers of its own independence. If you mentioned the countless swindlers who betake themselves to the gaming tables, the *décavés*, the sham princes, the fraudulent counts, the grabbing duchesses, people replied: "Is there not at the Casino the finest staff of detectives in the world?" If you suggested a

possible attack from other states, the men of Monaco answered, "We are under the protection of France." That the day would come when a Spanish brigand, with two hundred armed men at his back, would land boldly in the harbour below the castle and proceed thence to loot the bank was a thought which no one in Monaco, or, indeed, in all Europe, had troubled himself with. Yet the day came, as we know. And this was the manner of its coming.

Some two hours before Delavigne, the excellent chief of the police, chatted with the harbour-master, Roubac, in his office at Monaco, an English yacht dropped anchor in the offing before Monte Carlo, and lay there while the Customs rowed off to question her. To these her captain, an exceedingly smart American seaman, replied that she was not making Monaco a place of call, that her owner was the Englishman, Captain Falconer, that she had a pleasure party on board, and, finally, that the Customs might go to the devil. They did not go to the devil, but returned to the harbour and there wagged their heads together. An Englishman's yacht was no novelty at Monte Carlo—certainly not. But this was a very big yacht; she had almost the cut of an armoured gun-boat; there were a great many people on board her. And why was she anchored in their offing? The Customs could not tell. One consolation alone remained to them. They had been told to go to the devil. And that was an English greeting beyond dispute.

Through the afternoon, until dusk indeed, the officers watched the English yacht closely. It was eight o'clock in the evening before she gave a sign of life or rewarded their patience in any way. At that time, when all the world had gone up to the

Casino to hear the music of the roulette board, when the croupiers bawled incessantly *faites vos jeux, messieurs et mesdames*, a delighted exciseman saw that she lowered a boat from her davits and that some of the Englishman's many friends were coming ashore in it. Suspicious and alert, he did not fail to note that the boat was rowed, not to the harbour quay, but towards the Casino itself and the terraced gardens which surrounded it. He asked himself, as he called a superior officer to his side, how such an action fell in with the captain's words that Monaco was not a point of call. He determined to put the question to the boat's crew, and so, with his officer at his heels, began to run down the broad road to Monte Carlo, and was at the water's edge as the gig came up.

"Stop, stop, messieurs; you cannot land here," he cried, waving the stranger back with extended arms.

A man in the boat, one called Major Georges by his friends, sprang lightly to shore and answered the exciseman by a blow from the butt of a pistol, which laid him flat upon his back, and caused him to see as many stars as a zealous astronomer might discern in a month. No sooner was the blow struck than the exciseman's superior felt the sharp point of a boat-hook as it hitched itself in his coat at the shoulder and drew him headlong into the surf. When he rose, with water pouring from his mouth and ears, a strong hand dragged him into the boat and a stern voice bade him be silent. He looked around him mute with wonder. There were fifteen men in the boat, and every one carried a Remington rifle. Even more significant was a light carriage above which there gleamed the barrel of a gun.

"It is a Maxim!" the terrified exciseman said to

himself, as he lay in the bottom of the boat shivering as much with fear as with the cold.

* * * * *

Let us turn a moment from this strange scene upon the shore to the great Casino on the hill of Monte Carlo.

It was the hour of eight o'clock, when the gamesters were returning from their hotels and from dinner to the greater excitements of the night.

A strange company, with ears for nothing but the voice of the croupier, eyes for nothing but the green cloth and the money there, it swarmed into the great rooms, forgetful of time, or place, or people.

That inexplicable fever which bankruptcy may cool, but death alone can cure, burned in the eyes of these players, and made their hands tremble. Men pushed women from the tables and were not ashamed; grabbers of other people's stakes plied their calling briskly; a garish light of many lamps fell upon hard, set faces. If any paused a moment to question a neighbour, the topic was ever the same:

"Ha! *mon vieux*, you win to-night?"

"Enough to fill a salt-spoon."

Or again:

"Any news, old chap?"

"That lucky beggar of a Jack Lorrimer has won five thou."

"The devil he has! and I'm staking my last fiver. After that, it's the Cape Police or the Canadian frontier—the last refuge of the stone-broke."

"Why not the Phantom Army; you should go and join the Spanish chap, if you can find him. I hear there's an Englishman with him, and that the

pay is a couple of thousand a year. Of course, I believe it."

The young men—two English lads just down from Oxford—laughed loudly. The elder of the two stood for a moment with his hands thrust deep in his pockets considering the excellent advice offered to him.

"If those chaps exist," he said presently, "I wonder they don't come here. Look at the jewels round the roulette table there. They'd have a fine harvest, and we might pick up some of the cash in the scramble. I could do with a couple of hundred very well just now."

The younger lad turned toward the table impatiently.

"No such luck," said he. "These things happen in the newspapers. It's just a good thumping lie—take my word for it. I'm off to try a tenner *à cheval*. If it doesn't come right, my excellent papa will have to wire and bail me out. The lecture can follow by post."

He had taken one step toward the table when his friend gripped his arm strongly and dragged him back.

"Look," he said, "look over there. That chap's got a rifle in his hand. What the deuce is he doing in this place?"

As the words were spoken, a loud voice, raised in the ante-room of the Casino, cried,—

"Shut the doors!"

"My God!" exclaimed the young Englishman. "The place is full of armed men."

Until a strange voice cried "Shut the doors!" no one else in the great ante-room had noticed that which

drew from the young Englishman an observation so remarkable. Whatever had happened to the keepers of the gate and to the detectives in the outer hall of the Casino, those within had no tidings of it. They heard no cries, no clang of arms. The croupiers continued to bawl *fâites vos jeux* or *rien ne va plus*; grabbers continued to snatch at other people's stakes; gamesters wandered from table to table irritably, *décavés* loafed expectantly, hoping for a friend who would lend them ten louis. Some of these, perchance, heard the voice, but remained indifferent. Their eyes were for the green cloth, and not for the door.

This strange indifference may have lasted a full minute. The English lads, watching the new-comers with amazed eyes, counted fifty of them, men of all nationalities, wearing black masks upon their faces and holding Remington rifles in their hands. To this number was added presently a band of six, who carried a Maxim gun, and proceeded deliberately to mount it upon a light carriage, and so to place it that it covered the great saloon and could have filled the hall with dead in three minutes. The people round about watched the proceeding as they might have watched an acrobat spreading his carpet. The servants of the Casino—there were five in the ante-room—stood still with the surprise of it.

"*Comment, M'sieur,*" cried one of them, when he found his tongue, "what are you going to do, then?"

The leader of the company, a huge man addressed by the others as Jussuf, laughed grimly at the question.

"You will know in a moment, monsieur," he said.

The official, in reply, stared at him wildly, and then made as though to run for the exit.

"The Spaniard! the Spaniard is here!" he cried.

In no wise disconcerted by his display, a trooper stepped forward and tripped him up so neatly that he turned a somersault in the air and came to carpet on the flat of his back.

"Lie there," said the man, "or I will blow your brains out."

The man lay shivering with fear. His fellows stood gaping at the masked men. The English lads exchanged whispered confidences.

"It's the Spaniard all right—what luck!"

"We're safe enough, anyhow. I'm going to see the show through. They won't touch an Englishman, you bet."

"They're going to clear the bank, I suppose. Well, you won't lose your last fiver to-night, old man."

"It's worth twenty fivers to see this business."

His companion was about to reply to him, when a loud scream echoed through the rooms, and was heard, shrill and clear, even above the babble of the gamblers. It came from a Spanish woman, who stood upon the threshold of the hall, and surveyed the masked company with terror uncontrollable. So incessant was her cry that a hush fell upon the players. Men and women half rose from their seats to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. The croupiers ceased for a moment their invitations to the game. Detectives came out of their places of concealment, and ran towards the hall. Outside the great doors, loud shouts and knocking were now to be heard.

"Open! open! in the name of the police."

A scene hesitating and slow, to be changed in an instant to one of terror and of riot. Even as the gamblers stood bewildered, asking themselves why

there were masked men in the Casino, the leader of the men, Jussuf, raised his voice again.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "you will leave the room one by one. Each will hand the gold he now possesses to me before he goes out. The croupiers will keep their places until released. If any one resists, he will be shot."

He uttered another word of command, and the Maxim gun swung round on its carriage, and its barrel shone bright under the garish rays. For a spell, utter silence prevailed. When it passed, a panic, surpassing all panics in the gamester's history, succeeded to it. Women ran shrieking to and fro, crying for mercy to men powerless to protect them. Sham counts, mock princes, rogues from all countries, raised their voices together to declare that the Spanish brigand was at Monte Carlo. From twenty doors, the detectives of the Casino rushed out with revolvers in their hands. Strong men threw themselves upon the floor to escape the bullets' path; women huddled together in corners consoling one another; a deafening roar went up as from the throat of an army.

"Cease, cease, for God's sake! Are you all madmen?—do you forget the women?—stand back, I say—fools, you have an army to face. Will you fight with umbrellas?"

A loud voice—an English voice—appealed to them. When the confusion had abated a little, all turned to stare at a white-haired old general standing with his daughter at his side in the very centre of the ante-room. Of all the terrified men who faced the marauders, he alone kept his head and his courage.

"Gentlemen," he said again and again, "come to your senses, I beg of you. Remember we have

women here. Will you fight an army with your sticks?"

Jussuf, the leader of the Spaniards, hastened to second his appeal.

"The Englishman is right," he said, "we have an army at our backs, messieurs. You will do well to listen to him. Our friends command the road from Monaco. Your soldiers cannot help you. Let those fools, then, throw away their pistols and no one will be hurt."

The detectives, of whom there were forty, stood huddled together in the centre of the room. Many of them had revolvers in their hands, but some were quite unarmed. If this had been a visitation from Heaven, it could not have surprised them more. And they knew that they were impotent. The terrible gun would cut them down like chaff at the first movement.

"It is a national affair," said their leader, as he threw down his pistol at the Spaniard's feet; "I surrender to save the lives of these innocent people. They are witnesses of the protest I make in the name of Monaco. The reckoning will be for to-morrow, M'sieu."

"We are always glad to reckon, my friend," replied old Jussuf grimly, "because the balance is sure to be on our side. You do well to throw away that pistol—it is a dangerous weapon. Let the others make haste to be as wise."

He looked from man to man appealingly, and they, in turn, hastened to throw their pistols at his feet, as the chief had done. Indeed, they seemed very glad to be quit of them; and many a woman in that room breathed again when the accredited defenders of the

Casino no longer carried arms. There was something in the voice and manner of the Spaniard which demanded obedience. It brought that great room to the silence of terror and dismay; yet in its way it moved men to hope. These great fellows in the rough serge coats and black peaked caps—they were neither cut-throats nor footpads. Men had heard of the Phantom Army even at Monaco. They shuddered as the armed figures began to move through the rooms and the gold offered to them clinked in their hands. The very hag's tale, that these were not as other men, came to the remembrance of many a shrinking girl who had heard of Lorenzo of Spain and of the White Hussars of Gavarnie. Women feared no longer for themselves, but for their precious louis and for the jewels about their arms and necks. It was pitiful to see aged dames, the paint running from their faces, the black from their eyes, as they fell upon their knees and implored grace. It was ridiculous to watch a fat French banker as he roared incessantly, regardless of time or place, that some one should bring him brandy. But the silent troopers were disturbed by none of these things. "Gold! gold!" was their cry.

The answer was ever "Mercy, mercy!"

From man to man they passed, and table to table. The rakes which the croupiers had just been using served them to rake the gold pieces into their great canvas bags; they broke open the boxes wherein the bank kept money for the day, and the golden coins went rolling upon the floor. Silver they despised and the cheaper jewels of the women. Many a woman wearing paste that night, and shedding crocodile's tears for it, was their butt and laughing-stock. But diamonds of price they snatched greedily. Their work

was followed by piteous cries and entreaties; by the oaths of men—here and there by active resistance. The croupier in charge of the *trent-et-quarante* table locked his box and refused to give up the key. They laid him senseless upon the floor with a blow from the butt-end of a rifle and forced his box with a crowbar. Then a section hastened to the collars below—for there the safes were kept and riches, they said, to pay the debts of an empire. The loud reports of the dynamite cartridges with which they forced the locks shook the building to its foundations. Women fainted as they heard them. Men cried to each other that the soldiers would be up in five minutes—in ten. Panic fell upon the place again and was magnified, when a rattle of musketry echoed in the gardens of the Casino and a roar of voices proclaimed that the attack from without had begun.

“The soldiers! the soldiers!” cried a hundred together; “they have come from Monaco, and we are saved.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CHIEF OF THE POLICE AGAIN

DELAVIGNE was bareheaded when he found himself out in the road leading up to Monte Carlo; but he ran on regardless of that. Old Roubac, the harbour-master, grown fat and scant of breath, toiled after him protestingly and with many a nautical expletive.

"What are you doing, Delavigne? what are you doing?" he gasped. "To the barracks first, wooden-head, and then to the Casino. You cannot fight armed men with your fists. Mother of God, I am shaking like a sack."

Delavigne scarcely heard him. His eyes were staring from his head. He ran as a man for a cup.

"You see the yacht, Roubac," he shouted; "she has two masts and one funnel. Remember that when I ask you. For the rest we shall know presently. *En avant, mon ami*, we have a city to save."

"To the devil with the city!" roared Roubac, but still he kept on, fascinated and carried upon the wings of an excitement surpassing anything he had ever known. Everywhere now the streets were awake to the danger. Gendarmes rushed hither and thither seeking leaders to direct them. Peaceful shopkeepers put up their shutters and bawled incessantly, "*Aux armes!*" Little children romped in the gutters,

delighted that bedtime was postponed. Horses and carriages dashed past, carrying those whose panic would not brook control.

To these and to the vast throng of terrified townspeople the coming of Delavigne was as the advent of a conquering general. They swarmed about him; they besought him with tears in their eyes to protect them; women kissed his hands; a thousand voices roared, "The soldiers are coming; courage, friends!" But still the chief ran on.

He must see for himself, he said. He must know the worst.

Not until he stood in the great square of Monte Carlo, before the very gate of the Casino, did he so much as draw a full breath.

"Great God!" he said, stopping suddenly, as the truth dawned upon him, "the doors are shut."

Roubac came panting up behind him. A few of the bolder spirits among the crowd stood round watching the doors of the Casino. The square was quite in darkness, for the electric lamps had been smashed. But more ominous still was the silence. The broad road by which the gamblers passed to fortune or to ruin was a deserted road now. The laughing voices of pretty women were heard no more. A subdued roar of sound emerged from the vast building. It was the roar which went up at the moment of the young Englishman's discovery.

"They are shooting the women. Do you stand still and listen to that, Monsieur Delavigne?" asked a cynic in the crowd.

Delavigne awoke as from a sleep.

"They are inside, and we shall trap them," he cried. "To the barracks! to the barracks!"

But old Roubac said grimly,—

"They are outside as well; I can see the barrels of their rifles."

As if in answer to him, a loud voice coming from the shrubs about the entrance to the Casino cried,—

"Halt!" At the same moment, every ear heard the rattle of rifles picked up suddenly, and not a few eyes detected the gleam of bright barrels as the straggling moonlight fell upon them.

"The guns! the guns!" cried the mob, as it went helter-skelter back to the town; but Delavigne stood his ground, and old Roubac was there to give him courage.

"Who speaks?" asked the chief of the police, stepping forward boldly into the light.

The response came from an exceedingly tall, sandy-haired Austrian, who advanced slowly across the square, and was followed by two troopers, who held their rifles as though they could fire them on the slightest provocation.

"Monsieur," said the Austrian ironically, "I regret to see that you have no hat. Pray permit me to lend you one, or certainly you will catch cold."

Delavigne stepped back a pace, as the rifles were handled menacingly.

"I shall know you again, monsieur," he said, "when you are in the prison at Marseilles."

The Austrian laughed good-naturedly.

"My friend," he said, "the air is cold up here—it does not agree with you. Be advised by me and go to bed."

Delavigne shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not to be advised by bandits," he said savagely.

"But you risk your precious life, monsieur."

Delavigne laughed for the first time.

"It is something to have a precious life to risk, monsieur! and hark; there are the soldiers. The risk is at an end, you see."

A bugle blast echoing from the streets below warranted the chief's confidence. As the men stood listening in the deserted square, they heard the tramp of an armed company; at first a muted tramp, then waxing strong, then joining itself to the volley of voices, then swelling, swelling into other sounds, until the very air quivered with the fierce cries of men and the clamour of a city militant.

"The soldiers! the soldiers!" cried Delavigne, turning suddenly and running down the road.

A shout of laughter followed him. "You are a very champion in boots, Monsieur Delavigne," roared the sandy-haired Austrian. It was the last light word he spoke that night. No sooner had Delavigne disappeared than he crossed the square again, and began to number his men.

"Stand by the gun," he said; "you, Saint Cyr, will hold the garden steps. Yoli, let the Prince know that we can take care of ourselves where we are. Keep your fire, men, until they are out in the light. One volley—and no dead if you can help it."

They ran to their work, for the army of Monte Carlo was upon them. Nominally, it is an army of one hundred and twenty-six soldiers. But the official reports have told us that on the night when the Spanish brigand, Lorenzo de la Cruz, raided the place, eighteen of these one hundred and twenty-six were away on furlough, twelve were in hospital, and forty mounting guard at the palace of Prince Albert on the other side of

the town. Thus there remained but fifty-six to respond to the citizens' wild appeal *aux armes*. These came willingly enough to the work, for they did not know what was before them; and were reinforced by all the gendarmes which the bugle and clamour summoned from duty in the streets. A hundred and twenty, perhaps, who took no account of the delirious mob, swarmed at last into the square before the Casino and rushed blindly to the attack.

After all, the men said to themselves, they had but to face a riff-raff drawn from the scoundrelism of all countries. The desperadoes commanded by Lorenzo would never stand against drilled troops, they argued. So they came at the charge into the square, and the mob roared approval, and their officers waved swords above their heads, and such a mighty shout went up that the town might have been already free and the desperadoes driven into the sea.

A scene of contrasts, indeed. Yonder the great building, its illumined windows shining under the moon's translucent rays as a toy church that children play with; below it a square of shadows through which black figures moved, and the bright barrels of rifles were to be discovered, and the whispered voices of men were to be heard. Upon such a scene the army of Monaco came at the double. They realized nothing of its meaning, perhaps. They rushed headlong at the gates of the building. They laughed at the work before them, and were laughing still when the answering volley rang out from the shadows, and the moment of awakening came.

There had been a great shouting before the shadows spoke, but it was hushed as the red flame belched forth. The mob reeled back as from the mouth of hell itself.

The troops ceased to run, and looked at one another questioningly.

A young captain, who had led the attack with his sword high above his head, ran on still a little way, but suddenly fell headlong to the pavement, breaking the shining blade as he fell. Others began to tear at their clothes, for it was as though hot irons seared their flesh. One great fellow sat down against a kerb and blubbered like a child. "I shall never walk again," he said. Further thought of advance was in no man's head. The army of Monaco came to a halt, and all the fervid appeals of its reckless lieutenants would not move its dogged feet a step.

"Forward! forward!" cried a lad of nineteen, running on to the very bushes wherein the flaming death lurked. "Are you cowards, my men? will you run from a pack of brigands? Shame on you—soldiers of France!"

But no one stirred. The voices to be heard were those of men blaspheming because of the pain of their wounds. The little officer stood a moment upon the steps of the Casino—stood, indeed, until a hand was stretched out from the bushes to trip him deftly by the heels, and he fell headlong into a great flower-pot, still crying, "*En avant!* comrades!"

For a moment the mob laughed at so unexpected a diversion. Delavigne, the chief of police, was heard shouting: "Ten thousand francs to the man who takes the Spaniard." Another sound of guns arose presently from the streets in the town below, and some one exclaimed: "There is a second army in the town—they are robbing the banks." Fear of the shadows and of the terror lurking in them began to spread and was contagious. When at last a second volley was fired

from the gates, a wild cry went up alike from soldier and civilian, and a minute later the army of Monaco was beaten. It was not until many months had passed that those who fled knew that the cartridges used at the second attempt were blank. The vomited flame, the thunder of report, acting on nerves strained to a high pitch, were all sufficient.

With one loud cry the mob broke up and fled down the great road to Nice. Officers and privates, gendarmes and their chiefs, lads come to see the fun, tottering old men—the wind of panic swept them headlong back to the town. Weak trampling upon strong, fathers treading upon children, soldiers clubbing those they had come out to defend—it was an orgie of rout, a *debâcle*, like to nothing known in history.

Long through that night of terror, the people of Monte Carlo walked the streets telling in hushed whispers of the things which had been. And until dawn came carriages dashed by to Nice; and those who rode in them were women weeping for their jewels and men cursing for their gold. Sleep had fled the town, yet none dared to walk abroad. Horsemen rode wildly to carry the news from village to village and barrack to barrack. Strong men hid in cellars and remembered the prayers of their childhood. The wrecked rooms of the Casino, the broken windows, the gleam of jewels upon the floor, the fragments of lace, the forgotten handkerchiefs, were the relics of the Spaniard's visit.

But Lorenzo de la Cruz and those who had helped him were already far out at the sea; and the yacht which had brought them was no longer one of two masts and a single funnel. She sailed under the

American flag, and as she made the shelter of a cove beneath the northern headland of the island of Majorca, she had but one mast, and her funnels were two.

Away at the Hôtel de l'Europe, in Beaulieu, where they discussed the thing next day, the fat host meeting the sleek subordinate had a note of triumph in his voice when he exclaimed,—

“Oh, the great Boisson!—twelve hours too late—the great man, the marvel!”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TWO WOMEN IN THE HILLS

THERE was a bitter wind blowing down from the Pyrenees to the plains of Arragon on the eve of Christmas in the year of Spain's misfortunes; but neither that nor the lateness of the hour deterred Isabella de Gavarnie and little Giralda as they rode through the Spanish town of Jaca and turned their horses' heads towards the glittering peaks of the French frontier.

For the matter of that, though it had gone eleven o'clock, the whole town was waking and alert. Hussars galloped through it incessantly; officers rode in and out with a jangle of accoutrement, and many an oath for the business which kept them from their beds; priests stood at the doors of their houses and scanned the faces of all who passed by. In the fonda itself, men gathered in little groups to discuss that for which they had waited through long years. The end had come, they said; the master had returned to them; he would rule at Madrid before the Epiphany.

"A miracle! a miracle!" cried one old soldier who remembered '38; "all Europe talks of it, my friends. They say in Zaragoza that the South is in the master's hands. Ten days ago he was at Monte Carlo, a great city across the seas. It fell before him—a city of gold and precious stones. And now our Queen is here.

They will go together to the capital ; there will be no more civil guards ! ”

“ *Anda usted !* ” cried a fierce fellow from Torla who had listened open-mouthed. “ I will believe that when I count the bodies of the guards myself. Are there not hussars in the mountains and the soldiers from Madrid ? We shall see what we shall see. ”

One of the others, a stolid blacksmith, joined the talk with a word of contempt for the man of Torla.

“ Truly, ” he said, “ there are hussars in the hills, but the master is there before them. This will be a night we shall never forget, we and our children. They tell me the Prince commands a hundred thousand men from France and England. *Madre de Dios !* what a story to hear ! ”

“ There they go, ” exclaimed another, “ the artillery from Zaragoza. They will not look so well presently, those fellows, and there will be dead men to load the guns. Well, it was time to end this dog’s life. We will try a new king. A child has ruled us too long. ”

They all crowded to the door of the hostelry to see the guns go rumbling by. Eighteen pieces there were, and great hulking fellows upon the horses, and mud everywhere, even upon the bright barrels of the field-pieces.

When they were gone, the open door of the inn permitted a strong ray of light to glitter upon the bayonets of the infantry who followed them. Company after company, here broken by a regiment of lancers, there by a regiment of hussars, went on doggedly towards the distant mountains.

Splashed with mud, cold and hungry, these wretched fellows yet carried some spirit to the work.

"We go to fight the rebels," they cried to the priests who asked news of them. "We shall come back to-morrow—it will be a merry day."

The same words were heard in many a village upon that eve of Christmas, for men forgot the feast, and told themselves that to-morrow might shatter a throne and bring a rebel triumphant to Madrid.

Isabella de Gavarnie and little Giralda had ridden out of Zaragoza shortly after mid-day. A messenger came to them from the mountains to tell them that the Prince was in Spain and had set up his standard at Torla.

"It is for to-day, señora," he said bluntly. "There are a hundred thousand in arms in Arragon this moment. To-morrow will make us masters of Madrid."

Little Giralda clapped her hands at the news. Isabella drew back from the window of her house that the man might not see the flush upon her face.

"Let our horses be made ready. I shall be at Torla before midnight."

And so it came about the two were passing through the little town of Jaca when the clock struck eleven at night.

They had ridden all day, but excitement mastered fatigue for them. While the younger of the sisters turned her eyes ever to the marching squadrons they passed, the elder thought of that home of her father's to which she was returning. The hour which the dead Philip of Gavarnie had foreseen was come at last. The standard of the man her father believed in was set up for good or ill. To-morrow would tell her all—to-morrow might bring Lorenzo to her side to

remind her of the oath to him. She shuddered at the thought and rode the faster through the waking hamlets, on to the hill-land where the end must be.

"It is like a country of my dreams," she said as they passed from the light of a village to the intense darkness of a glow beyond it; "the shape of every house seems familiar, though I have not seen it for twenty years. I am a child again to-night, Giralda; the dead past rises before me—the dead live!"

"God keep our dead, dear sister. I think sometimes that I shall be a child to my life's end. I would not wish it otherwise. There is nothing so good as childhood. For you, it is different. You have your people to remember. Oh, surely, our father rides with us to Torla this night. His spirit will breathe upon our armies. Heaven will put a sword in his hand to fight for Spain again. My heart is on fire when I see the beacons on the hills. I hear my father's voice in every whisper of the wind, and he promises the victory to us."

Isabella wondered at the child's belief. Now that the hour was at hand she dreaded the outcome of it. Victory would mean fulfilment of her father's commands; defeat would mean—she dare not think. She was tempted to pray for defeat, yet put the thought from her as a sin.

"We shall need the help of Heaven, Giralda," she said, when they had ridden through the glen and come out on the hillside again. "It is one man against the armies of a nation. God alone can give the victory."

"God and the people, my sister. Look how they flock to the hills. Who will stand against their will when the master leads them? I care not for all the

soldiers in the world when these are with us—they stand for our country and our life.”

A mob of peasants trudging the road ahead of them inspired the outburst. A ragged company it was, carrying weapons that would have served the first of the ages—scythes upon sticks, clubs of wood, iron bars, gleaming knives. Half drunk with wine and excitement, the peasants sang ribald songs as they went. Their eyes were turned towards the beacon fires. They listened often for any sound of the civil guard upon the road behind them.

When Isabella's servants cried, “Way for the house of Gavarnie,” they received her with clamorous shouts. “*La Reina! la Reina!*” they cried.

By and by her name was heard even in the villages, and all the people stood in the streets to call a blessing upon her head.

That magic excitement born of power began to fill her veins. How, she asked, if the day had really come when Lorenzo would rule Spain? A vision of a moment showed her the palace at Madrid and herself as the mistress of it. The grim scenes around her banished that vision, and brought her back to reality.

They were drawing very near to the mountain town of Torla, and once or twice in the open places of the heights they discerned the artillery and squadrons lurking in the woods. But of the troops, which report said had flocked to Lorenzo's standard, they saw nothing. Beacon fires flared on all the hills. Everywhere a motley crowd of peasants swarmed northward with primitive weapons in their hands. But the army—the army of the revolution—where was that?

“He will be beyond Torla, in his home,” said little Giralda, shrinking from the truth which now refused

to be hid. "He is waiting the moment to strike. If there are traitors in our camp, there are traitors in the other. God will not rule against him, dear sister."

Isabella struggled a little while against her own weariness. She was at the very gates of her own home—the land her fathers had ruled. The great snow mountains, standing sentinels on the frontier of France, rose up before her as mighty barriers of her kingdom. In the town of Torla, which she could see from the road, horsemen were busy at their arms and their girths; the doors of every inn stood open; a tremendous throng of peasants moved on incessantly towards the hills. When she came to the town at last, a priest recognised her, and cried out her name. The people took it up, and soon a resounding shout arose. Men ran out with torches; a great procession was formed; the bright blades of swords flashed in the air.

"*La Reina! la Reina!*" they cried; "our Queen has come to save us!"

Isabella saw the rugged faces, and drew back from them. How it was she knew not, but in that moment there came to her a sudden remembrance of another home of hers far away in London, and of a man who had come to that home out of the city's silent world, and had been her friend.

"I love you, take me to your home," she had said to him.

CHAPTER XL

A PEOPLE AWAKENED

THE cries which greeted Isabella de Gavarnie in the village of Torla were heard upon the heights—though none knew their meaning. They echoed in the great cave where Lorenzo waited; they were heard in the woods where lurked the peasants who had come out with their scythes in their hands to strike a blow for Spain and the Faith—and for their own pockets. The master of the rebels listened to them and began to take heart a little. “It is a people awakened,” he said; “it is the voice of God speaking for us.”

The hussars had pitched their camp upon the banks of the sleeping lake—in the heart of that mountain haven which had served them for so many victories. Flaring torches cast a crimson radiance upon the sullen faces of the men and upon the black and unruffled waters. Horses whinnied in the unlighted stables, and their neighing sent echoes trembling through and through those tombs of the mountains. Weird patches of light, striking upward to the mighty vault of the cave, disclosed a myriad of depending stalactites—suspended jewels about which a thousand lights hovered. Messengers rode in from the hills every moment, and their news brooked no delay.

“The troops! the troops! there are twenty thousand at Jaca. We are betrayed, comrades. They swarm in

the pass; they are dragging guns to the heights. God save us all this night."

The white horsemen heard the tidings, and their hearts sank within them. The glittering gold lace and the tossing plumes were sorry things that night. In whispers the troopers muttered of the life which had been—the raiding of châteaux, the pillaging of banks, the wild rides through the hills, the glorious days when their yacht had sailed the tideless sea and they had been masters of the South. Why were they returned to Spain at all? they asked. Their chief alone could answer that question, and he was silent. If he had spoken, he would have said that a woman's letter called him to Torla. "I will be your wife when the day is won," she had written. He had waited for that promise through long years.

The troopers listened gloomily for the order which should save them from the armies of Spain; but midnight struck before any order was given to them. Ever since sunset they had heard the clamour of the mighty rabble then gathered in the woods about Lorenzo's house. They knew that yesterday hussars had ridden through the hills crying everywhere, "It is for to-night, señores, at the cave of Torla." They knew that mass had been said in many a hill-side church that morning for Spain and the Faith. Often they had gone to the doors of the cave to watch the beacon fires flaring, or to see the multitude of people waving its rude weapons on high and telling all the world that the armies of the master were already on the march. As Isabella had asked, as those peasants had asked, so was the question within the camp—Our army, where is it? The hundred thousand who were to march with us, where are

they? The dream of dreams was over. It blinded but one man in all Torla that night. The end had come. Even the White Hussars knew the truth.

Through the terrible hours of waiting, Lorenzo discussed the situation with his officers, apart in a smaller cave, where there was a rude table and maps of the mountains and a camp-bed for the chief and candles in silver sticks. He wore a grey overcoat to hide the gold lace upon his white uniform, and his horse was tethered at the door, but the hours passed and still he waited. Messenger after messenger rode in, and still he gave no order. All the man's power of mental concentration and of clear thought seemed to have left him in that hour. Nervously he paced the little room; he turned from one to the other, asking opinions which, when expressed, he did not hear. A very Napoleon at the brigands' board, war found him incoherent, vacillating—yet a zealot to the last.

"Let them come! let them come!" he cried vain-gloriously, as tidings of the enemy became more pitiless with every hour; "the mountains are still open to us. That is where I shall fight, at the pass of Yezdez. Five hundred have held it before to-day against a hundred thousand. We shall do as they did. We shall make history to-night, *mes amis*. We shall write a page in the annals of Spain which all the centuries will not blot out."

The others—the old Duke of Verdun, Jussuf, the General of his army, Yoli, Saint Cyr, above all the Englishman, Noel Falconer—heard him with troubled faces. It was pitiful to watch that sturdy figure in the grey overcoat pacing the room as a caged beast, looking for sympathy now to this man, now to that,

yet meeting everywhere a stolid foreboding and a silence which could not be misread.

"Has no one a word for me?" he asked desperately, at last. "Is it all to fall upon my shoulders? Must I do everything? Have you lost your tongues, gentlemen? I say that we shall ride to the pass of Yezdez and hold it against any force which they can send against us. What have you to urge against that? Is it not a plan which I can carry out? Is it not a safe plan? Are there traitors even in my own camp? Will no one answer me?"

Old Jussuf stepped forward and confronted his master.

"Prince," he said quietly, "there are no traitors here. If we are silent, it is because we have been out to the hills and have seen things there which we cannot mistake. Fifty thousand troops and a hundred guns stand between Zaragoza and the frontier. We are two hundred and fifty strong and have a rabble to lead. What sort of a meeting can that be—between the trained army and the peasant with a scythe in his hand? Your plan to ride to the pass of Yezdez would be wise if the road were open. But it is hedged with troops, and there are artillery on the heights. We cannot serve Spain by hoping for a miracle. Let us accept defeat, then, and come back when the traitor is forgotten and the hills are empty."

Lorenzo heard him with impatience, then he turned to the others.

"You agree with that, señores?" he asked quickly. "I am to turn my back on Torla when there are a hundred thousand men of Arragon and of Biscay waiting for me yonder. I am to proclaim myself coward and craven before the world? You are all agreed?"

Noel Falconer, the Englishman, answered him.

"It is better to turn your back upon a hundred thousand than to lead them to the gibbet, Prince. The hunchback has sold your secrets, and they are known to all Europe. If you throw down the glove to-night, your enemies will laugh as they pick it up. In three months' time it will be different. The hunchback will be dead then and there will be no troops at Torla. I say this because you have asked us to speak. It is the opinion of all, and once spoken there is the end of it. If you differ from us, we are ready to follow you to the end of the world. But do not speak of traitors, for that is an insult to those who serve you and are ready to give their lives for you."

Lorenzo stood a moment rocking upon his heels. The savage look of anger passed from his face. He turned to Falconer and clasped his hand.

"You are my friend," he said eagerly, "I count upon you. There are no traitors here, God forbid. There are those I love, and those I will save by God's help. Señores, forgive one who has a heavy burden upon his shoulders. Forgive him, if he cannot desert a people that has offered its life for his sake. You hear those voices—they are the voices of the men of Arragon crying for their leader to come to them. Shall I betray my children? I would lose my own life first. Ride with me now and strike a blow against those who are this people's enemy. You say that no miracle shall be worked. I tell you that you have no faith. The Almighty has chosen me for this work. His hand will be over us to-night; a light from Heaven will guide our steps. To-morrow they will say in Madrid, the White Hussars defied the armies of Spain, and were not afraid. We will hold the pass of Yezdez

against a hundred thousand. We will lead the people to their homes again, and the angels of God will go with us. We will fight so good a fight that our names shall be remembered while Spain is. Ah, you come, you come! I read it in your faces. You do not turn from me. You are my friends still—you that I love and will lead to victory."

He pleaded as an advocate for a child, words from a dreamer's heart; vain words, it might have been, which ministered to his pride. History has said that the cry of the rabble gathered then in the hills of Torla was the cry he could not resist. The offer of kingship, even for an hour, was the fruit for which he stretched out his hand. He must move among this people which uttered his name with awe; must hear their cries of welcome, and behold them prostrate at his feet. Those others, those who listened to his burning words, were stirred by them as by the voice of a great orator. Their own fears and forebodings, their counsels of prudence, their sure knowledge of the end were all forgotten as the man put out the finger of his eloquence and touched their hearts. He stood there with hand upraised and burning eyes and flaming cheeks, and they were silent no more.

"For Spain and the Faith!" they cried, and their swords flashed in the wan light, and they rushed from the room as men intoxicated with the wine of war.

"It is to the garrotte," said the troopers, when the bugle sounded the assembly in the great cavern of Torla.

And so the White Hussars rode out.

CHAPTER XLI

TEN THOUSAND HEAR THE CRY

THE torches went out in the cavern where the great lake slept, and utter darkness fell again. A sentry pacing there heard the ring of hoofs upon the stone floor of the tunnel by which Lorenzo led his men to the open heights of the mountains. He asked himself what sounds he next would hear in that desolate place, or whose hand would kindle a torch again to cast a glow upon the still, black waters. Anon, a mighty clamour of voices echoed faintly even there at the mountain's heart. "It is the voice of the people," said the soldier to himself; "to-morrow they will scream prayers from a gibbet."

Lorenzo rode out of the cavern, not by the pass of the cascade, but through a tunnel which brought him to the woods below his own house. A great beacon fire burned at the place, and many a thousand rebels awaited the coming of the master, of him sent by God for their deliverance. A ragged concourse; here men upon mules gaily decked out with ribbons and brodered cloths; there cut-throats, who knew every prison of the North; women and hussies mingling in the throng; priests passing to and fro to scatter blessings as they went—the peasants had counted the hours of night as they waited, yet never for an instant had doubted that the White Hussars would come. When, ultimately, the troop appeared and the fire-light

flashed upon the burnished gold, and white plumes waved to the wind, and swords cut the branches, the multitude sprang to its feet and sent up such a shout that the very rocks might well have opened and the dead come forth.

"*Viva! Viva!* Long life to the Prince! Our King has come again! To Madrid! *Viva el rey! Viva, Viva!* Lorenzo is here!"

A strong heart might have quaked before such a sound. As the horsemen drew rein and women kissed their hands, and great fellows from the hills dropped upon their knees, and the priests began to recite their prayers, and the signal rockets rose flamingly above the trees, the fever of the night fell alike upon those who led and those who served. Counsellors, speaking lately of prudence, were the first to forget their counsel. The fires of war flared up in every heart; plunging horses and the bellowing of lusty throats, and the shrill laughter of the women, and the cold breezes of night, life giving and uplifting, intoxicated as new wine. Out there in that high place, with the boundless world of stars above, and the valley of pines spread out below them, and the blazing pyres upon the mountains, the White Hussars may well have felt masters of a kingdom and of Spain.

"*Viva el rey!*" they answered to the people; "tomorrow we shall ride the Prado, comrades. *Viva, Lorenzo;* onward, onward!"

The very horses caught the spirit of it, and could not be held. Leaping, rearing, they began to gallop, and the rabble swept on with them. The great round cup of the hills was the arena. Round and round the hussars swept, from wood to wood, and beacon to beacon. Now bending their heads to the branches of a

thicket, now up in their saddles at the charge, crying ever "Onward!" the surging mob swarmed after them in vain.

Never had the forest of Torla seen so strange a spectacle. Women wept or fell hysterical as they staggered from covert to covert. Men trod them down with their mules and roared "Onward!" Priests prayed as they ran and cursed when they stumbled. As some panorama of changing scenes, so was that vision of white horsemen on the crest of the valley. Now seen in all splendour upon the open sward, now hidden by the brake; sometimes an apparition as of phantoms riding, at other times a glorious spectacle as of an unearthly host in a pillar of golden cloud, they dashed from camp to camp and forest to forest. The very ground quaked with the thunder of the hoofs. Men's tongues cleaved to the roofs of their mouths as they cried, "Victory! victory! the King of Arragon has come to us!"

Until this time, and before the magic of that ride, men had forgotten the troops of Spain and all the strange report of treachery and surprise which their day of waiting had brought to them. Watching that white-winged troop on the hill side, the peasants may well have succumbed to the spell of the hour, and have told themselves that to-morrow, indeed, would crown the King of their choice. As they forced their way through the woods, as the thorns cut their hands and the bramble tore their ragged cloaks, all sense of personal danger left them. The master would protect from that other king—the baby of Madrid and his soldiers. God would work a miracle for them. Fire would come down from Heaven, and there would be no more civil guards.

"Onward then!" they cried, "onward in the master's steps!" When, at last, they heard a rattle of musketry, and the forest belched forth a crimson cloud of flame, they told each other laughingly that the miracle began. While the sounds magnified, and tocsins were ringing in the villages, and the deeper note of artillery was heard, they panted on headlong, shouting, "Victory! to victory!" Ten thousand, ragged and armed as they were, heard the war-word and took it up. Drunk with hope, the sweat streaming from their faces, the blood from their hands, they swarmed upwards to the place of danger, to the place of death. Step by step they gained it, the mouth of that thicket where the infantry of Spain lay and the armies which the generals of Spain commanded. The pitiless fire opened upon them at last. The night of terror began.

"Christ Jesus!" they wailed, as they reeled back from that swift death, "the master has left us! the master is dead!"

CHAPTER XLII

ONWARD

NOEL FALCONER rode by Lorenzo's side on the crest of the ridge which encircles Torla. The watch-fires on the heights around illumined the forest so that the trees spread branches of gold and all the grass radiated the crimson light. The village below was an island of lamps in a dark and silent sea. The faces of the maddened peasants he passed were upturned and distorted with many passions. He heard their cries as a sound afar. The rhythmic music of the hoofs was thunder in his ears. He was as one tossed at the whim of a storm. The ecstacy of that fatuous ride became a very delirium. The people's watchword, "Onward!" cleaved to his lips and would not leave them. He repeated it deliriously. The end of his life had come, he thought. It was the death he would have chosen. A troop at the gallop sang the requiem. Dying men presently would recite the dirge.

"You are at my side, Captain?"

His chief spoke, and he awoke for a moment to the scene around him.

"I am here, Prince."

"And the others?"

"We follow you, Prince."

"God go with us; I see the pass, and the way is open. Fools! to think that I would fight them on the plain."

Old Jussuf spoke, bending low to breathe, so terrible was the pace.

"Beware the woods, master," he said; "beware the silence!"

"I go to call the people back, Jussuf; I am here to save them."

"Let us save ourselves first; there is time for the people afterwards," muttered the old Duke of Verdun. But the troopers took up the peasants' cry, and shouted "Onward!"

Onward, ay, for a truth, onward into the night. The angel of death winged above those silent forests; the figure of death leaped upon many a saddle to clasp a white horseman and to breathe a cold breath upon his heated face. Onward, through the dust-cloud, by brake and thicket, across the sleeping grass lands; onward to the music of hoofs and the applause of the panting rabble; onward to the pass where safety should be. As the pace waxed hotter and the goal came nearer many a one stooping in his saddle there asked himself if Heaven indeed had willed it; if the goal was to be theirs, after all. Those silent woods, if the troops of Spain filled them, why did they not speak? Those commanding heights, if the artillery of Spain were there, whose hand had stilled the guns? Was it all a lie then, this tale that the hunchback Ximeno had sold them to the Government? Was it a lie that General Goya had marched out of Madrid with fifty thousand at his back? It must be, or why were they not at Torla? Ah, why! The very question was broken on their tongues. A volley of flame from the hither wood answered it. It was the answer of the armies of Spain to the last mad ride of Lorenzo the rebel.

A rolling sound in the valley ! a great booming as a wave of echoes surging from hill to hill in long-drawn thunders ! From the woods by which the white horsemen rode, a sheet of leaping fire and the whirr of bullets ! The little army staggered and reeled as a ship struck at full sail by a treacherous squall. Cries of "Onward !" were choked upon lips that would never cry again. Brave horses fell, crushing the troopers they carried, and covering them with blood. Men wailed with pain, and rolled helplessly in their saddles. The rabble stood as though the heavens had opened and the voice of God had spoken. The angel of death stooped to count and the girdle fell from his waist. The white horsemen galloped still, but no man said "Onward !"

"You are at my side, Captain ?"

"I am here, Prince !"

"And old Jussuf ?"

Falconer did not answer him.

A trooper shouted :

"The General is dead ; they are cutting his body to pieces."

Lorenzo quivered in his saddle. His eyes were blind now and he saw nothing. The kingship was lost for ever. There was only death to come. He had loved these hills and the dominion over them. But he looked upon them for the last time. Self-reliance was done with. He must lean upon others. They must help him in the hour of his need. And it was strange that he turned again and again, not to his comrades of old time, but to this Englishman the woman had sent to his side.

"You are with me, Captain ?"

"I am here, Prince."

"The Yezdez road—are there troops upon that? God help me! my eyes are blind."

"There are cannon on the heights, and cavalry above the gully. You will make the pass with many dead."

"But we shall make it—we shall make it, Captain. And Jussuf was right. We must beware the woods. Christ Jesus, give me sight again! It is all dark, and my face is cold."

He stared helplessly into the night, for a film was upon his eyes and the lights were whirling round and round the valley as devils of defeat dancing before him. His fatuous belief that some miracle wrought of God would yet save him was real to the last. Had he not promised to make his children kings? Did not the Corsican conquer France with a few rounds of grape shot? He ground his teeth when he remembered his pride of old time; the glorious days of his supremacy on the hills; the terrible rides of the White Hussars to victory assured. When at length the trance passed from his eyes, and he could look upon his comrades again, the terror of the spectacle froze his heart.

From every side now the army of that Spain he would have freed poured a raking fire upon the flying troop and the rabble which reeled after it. No minute passed but one, who yesterday had been a thinking man, rolled headlong from his saddle and fell to the dust from which he came. Jussuf was gone, and Yoli, the splendid boy, and Arrizi, the finest shot the mountains had known. He could see the regulars rush out from the woods to thrust the quivering bodies and to thrust again. Peasants, with arms outstretched, fled from the shining bayonets, and screamed when the

steel cut them. Men with bloody faces sat upright in their saddles and bit their lips through in agony.

Away on the road to Torla a vast throng of the people rushed headlong towards the houses, and in among them were the civil guards, slashing, shooting, slaying. A dull roar of terror and of woe rose up from the valley, as a dirge of a multitude dying. Every height, every wood was full of the troops which General Goya had led out from Madrid. The amphitheatre of the hills became an amphitheatre of fire and flame—a theatre of death and of a monarch's vengeance. Smoke floated up to cloak the face of Heaven. Men prayed no longer, saying that the gate of Heaven was shut.

"I do not hear you, Captain. You ride with me?"

Once more Falconer answered, as he had answered so many times already :

"I am at your side, Prince."

"You will not leave me, *amigo*?"

"God forbid that I should think of it."

It was a pitiful question, Falconer thought; such a question as a child, walking a great city tremblingly, might put to the father whose hand he held. In that hour of the last great cataclysm, the Englishman's heart went out to the pitiful figure warring so piteously with the fate that had overtaken him.

For himself, he had no dreams but those of a woman who once had said, "I love you," but who remembered the words no more. He would die, there upon the hills of Spain, as he had lived, an outcast from his own country, with no child to mourn him, no gentle hand to lie in his, no friend to say, "I have not forgotten." But that other—that man born to look up to the high places where kings sat, fed upon the am-

bitions of a nation, living that he might reign, lusting ever for power and the aftermath of power—how different was his case! And God had cast them out together, the dreamer and the dreamer's son, out to the desolation of the mountains and to the rebel's death.

"God forbid that I should leave you, Prince," he repeated, as the troop swept onward and still onward, and fresh woods vomited the deadly flame, and the roar of cannon was unceasing; "we will stand together to the end—for good or ill."

Lorenzo sat upright in his saddle. Confidence came back to him refreshingly.

"Give me your help and you shall yet go with me to Madrid," he said; and then asked, "Where is Yoli?"

"Yoli is dead—on the crest yonder."

The man bowed his head again.

"And old Jussuf—God help me! I remember—Jussuf is gone, too. We shall avenge him. We shall save the people in the valley there. There is death here on these heights. To Torla, then, my comrades—to Torla!"

Falconer heard the command, and repeated it to the remnant of his troop. That it was the command of one delirious with defeat did not appal him. He had told himself already that the night was lost, and that nothing could save it. The treachery which had betrayed Lorenzo was all complete. Every hill, every arrête, every ridge was commanded by the enemy. Goya had done his work as any general of intelligence would have done it. And it was child's work. Two hundred and fifty desperadoes with a rabble whose arms were the scythe and the spade, against the pick

of the Spanish army! Valley or height, what mattered it? The music of death was heard on both. The agony of the bayonet's point could be no less at Torla than in the woods above.

Down from the grassy heights again, down through the bloody rabble, into the pit of death, the white horsemen rode. Blind with despair, drunk with defeat, they cared not whither it was or upon what road. Bullets rained upon them as fire from the stars. Horses, disembowelled, galloped by them screaming as human things. Bayonets struck up at them, and they felt the steel cutting a way to their very hearts. Dead or living, they rode over them alike. "Onward! onward," the cry was taken up again now; the dancing lights of Torla called them on, the delirium of speed uplifted them as upon wings of fire.

Onward, onward—to the town, to life. The rolling drums, the ceaseless rattle of the rifles, the booming of great guns were the deafening harmonies of that ride of rides. Men fell, and were cut to pieces as their bodies struck the ground. Women looked up to the faces of those who rode and found no pity there. Friend or foe, they knew the distinction no longer. A torrent of madness swept them on. Changing visions flashed before their eyes—now of bodies huddled in pools of blood; now of mothers staggering forward with their children; again of priests kneeling by the roadside; anon of countless faces written over with the hand of death. They heeded them not—for the end was come.

"Onward! onward!" They were in the town—at last. Out of the darkness of the woods to a blinding radiance of light; out of the shadows to the glare of streets, and the shelter of houses, and the roar of voices!

So they rode. And in the streets the end came, and the holocaust began ; and the bayonets flashed, and horses fell, and the screams of dying men were the requiem of the terrible night.

“ Onward ! onward ! ”

Ay, indeed, to the prisons of Spain and to the garrotte.

CHAPTER XLIII

EL DEMONIO

GENERAL GOYA sat in the best room of the inn at Torla, with the map of Arragon spread upon a table before him. He smoked a cigar confidently, and chatted as one very much amused to the others of his staff who waited with him. The distant roar of battle was pleasant music for his ears.

"It is a rout already, Colonel," he said to one at his side, as he tossed the map back indifferently; "why should we trouble with that? they are trapped like rats, and the dogs begin. Hark again! it is Gonzola, with his guns, on the road to Jaca."

"As you say, my General. The time for maps is past. We must begin to think of gibbets now."

"I will burn them alive, by God!" cried the General fiercely.

The staff laughed again, and began to speak of supper. The rolling wave of sound was more distinct now. In the streets of Torla a strange unrest was to be observed, as though the tide of war had begun to flow there. Horsemen galloped to the gates and galloped back again. Men ran out of the inns and shouted the news to those that lagged behind. Women's faces were seen at the upper windows. If hearts could have been read, belief in the star of the rebel would still have been found in the streets of that trembling town.

"He will come! he will come!" the women told each other; "God will bring him." Priests prayed in silent churches, before darkened altars, for fathers and for sons gone to the heights with scythes in their hands. They heard the thunder of the guns, and prayed the more that a miracle would be wrought. When cries told them that Lorenzo was really in the town, it seemed to them that their prayer was already answered.

The Spaniard rode in at the great gate, Noel Falconer at his side. For a little while the rabble forgot to greet him, that it might stare open-mouthed at the gigantic Englishman. Even the wounded crawled from their hiding-place to watch a spectacle so unlooked for and so amazing. Young girls in the houses fell upon their knees to pray that the master of the mountains might yet be victorious. The priests in the darkened churches recited their orations anew, and remembered the miracles of Galilee.

"The White Hussars are coming! We are saved, comrades; Lorenzo is here!"

The cry was a truth. The White Hussars were in the streets at last. Men saw the glittering swords, the foaming horses of those who once had been their phantoms. Stimulated no more by the exhilaration of the death-ride, Lorenzo's men forced their way up the narrow street doggedly and desperately, they knew not with what purpose nor to what destination. Keeping no recognised order, troop mingling with troop, they fought as horsemen never fought before.

"For Spain and the Faith! Lorenzo is here! Lorenzo is here!"

Ever the shimmering wave of white and gold drew nearer—nearer yet to that place where Goya awaited

it—to the great square of Torla, the theatre of death and of terror. For to the square the General of the Spanish regulars was luring the rebels. There his artillery was posted; there lurked his lancers; there every window was a loophole from which the rifles protruded.

“They come, they come—into the trap! It is the end, comrades. To-morrow there will be no more rebels in Spain.”

The multitude was still and hushed with its excitement, while the troops of Spain uttered their boasts. A miracle, indeed, was being wrought before its very eyes. That lumbering horseman who drove the outposts headlong before him—he was Lorenzo, at whose name Europe had learned to tremble.

“It is the master—the master himself! Oh, God be glorified!”

And that other at his side—that fair-haired gigantic Englishman, with a face almost effeminate in its delicate Grecian features, with an arm which wielded the best sword in all Spain that night—surely God had sent him to the salvation of the cause! How superbly he sat the great black horse which reared back from the gleaming bayonets! What a thing it was to see those others go down before him, to hear the strange tongue, and the wild words it spoke! They called him *El Demonio*—the demon. They thanked all the saints that they were not within the circle of that terrible blade.

“Hearken, comrades—‘Forward, the Tenth’—it is the English tongue he speaks. It is a prayer to the English God. He has sent many a one to purgatory this night.”

A prayer, indeed! “Forward, the Tenth.” Excite-

ment had carried Falconer's mind back to England again, and to the regiment he loved. The men at his side! He saw no Spaniards there. Comrades of old time all of them. That burly figure he shielded so often—surely it was the figure, not of a Spanish desperado, but of his old Colonel! Those others, were they not his own troop, the troop which had loved him before he went under? The very thought upheld him. All the scene before him, the narrow street, the bulging gables, the slowly retreating infantrymen, the glare of light from the inn-doors, was blotted from his sight.

“Forward, the Tenth.”

He rode into the market-place with that for his watchword.

It had been a mad hour, but the maddest of it was yet to come. The White Hussars were in the market-place at last. A vast mob followed upon their heels, pressing them onward, forbidding retreat. Falconer looked over the serried ranks before him, over the grim and threatening barricades, up to the loopholes of the silent houses. As a man awakening, he began to realize where he was, and why he had come. The lull in that human storm permitted him to hear again the voice of the man for whose sake he had ridden to this place of death.

“Well done! Captain; well done! If the others were like you! We will save it yet. Yonder are Goya and the guns. Forward, my men, forward!”

Lorenzo raised himself in his stirrups, and waved his sword triumphantly. If he could have turned to count those who followed him, he would have numbered but one hundred and fifteen of the white company which had ridden through the hills an hour before. The others! Half of them had deserted him without

shame, and the bodies of many more lay in the coppices up yonder. Such as were only wounded crawled through silent woods to the bubbling springs, wherein they might cool their burning fever. But the man who led them to their wounds had forgotten them already. "Forward!" he cried. A hail of bullets from the silent houses answered him. The rats were in the trap and the dogs were loosed.

"Have they hit you, Captain? My eyes are blind again. The smoke fills them. God send the light soon."

"I am safe, Prince—and you?"

"There is no bullet moulded in Spain to harm me. You will not leave me, my comrade."

"Leave you—God forbid!"

"Then forward—forward, men of Arragon—there is safety behind those guns."

A grim smile hovered upon Falconer's face. There were strange sounds in the square then; sounds of wailing and of cursing and of men in their agony. You could see the White Hussars rolling hither and thither in the press of the throng, glittering figures above an ocean of darkness. The rats were in the trap and the dogs were loosed.

So close was the press that the dead stood up with the living upon whose shoulders they fell. Hundreds at the rear ran shrieking from the square to find that the retreat was cut, and that cavalry waited in the by-streets. A mighty prayer for mercy raised by many thousands, and heard in distant villages upon the heights, was answered by the unceasing music of the guns. Goya himself roared the command to take the rebel alive.

"A bullet is too good for him," he exclaimed upon

an impulse; "we will have him in San Sebastian for the torture. Let the men cease firing. A hundred gold pieces to him who brings Lorenzo here. Another hundred for the Englishman. We will teach the dog a lesson, *amigos*."

The command rang out at a moment when Lorenzo, and Falconer at his side, had ridden up almost to the barricade itself. Both had wounds to show; both remained in the saddle only by a miracle. While the Spaniard's face was smeared over with blood, a bullet in the Englishman's shoulder burned with a pain which was intolerable. But the excitement of the hour kept them upon their horses.

Side by side, each wearing something of the other's confidence, they rode up to the guns. Heavy clouds of reeking smoke enveloped them; bullets struck their helmets, flattened against their holsters, glanced from their swords, whistled by their ears—but no bullet checked their advance. When the guns ceased to fire, and the loom of smoke drifted away, their white uniforms were still to be seen lifted above the quivering multitude of dying and of dead.

"A hundred gold pieces for the rebel—a hundred for the rebel alive! Down with him, comrades! it is the General's word."

With one wild shout, the regulars ran from the barricades, and beat the rabble back with their swords. A hundred hands were stretched out to snatch at the flying pelisse of the man, whose name for one brief hour had been a terror to Europe. They tore it from his shoulders; men clung to the legs of his horse, and struck at him with their fists; they sprang up behind him, and twined their arms about his neck. Falconer beheld a vision of a face hard set, as in the final struggle

with death. He saw the hands upraised to strike—he saw a man fall, and twenty fall with him. He heard the shouts of victory as the groaning, bleeding figure of his master was dragged beyond the barricade.

“It is the end,” he said.

One now, alone against the multitude. One in that great square against the thousands which Spain had sent! He stood up in his stirrups, and all that was Saxon within him mocked at the savage faces around him.

“In the name of the Tenth!” he said, and his lips closed together doggedly.

But the troops cried:

“The Englishman! A hundred gold pieces for the Englishman!”

Many of the rebels had escaped from the square by this time; the press flowed out by many an alley. It seemed to the driven man as he spurred his horse round the ring of houses that he was like a beast hunted in an arena to make a Spanish holiday. And he would give them sport yet.

“In the name of the Tenth!”

A burly rogue stretched out his hand to grasp the torn pelisse. The terrible sword flashed as a wheel of fire, and the severed hand fell upon the flags.

“Witness! witness! He is the devil possessed. A hundred gold pieces to the man who takes him.”

“*Maldita!* they will never take him! See how he rides. What blows! If we had such men in Spain, comrades!”

“Saint John! there are ten down and he is still upon his horse. Does he think that he can fight an army?”

"He is no fool; he is riding to the house yonder. His friends are there—the woman of Gavarnie and the gipsy girl, her sister. I can see their faces at the window."

"He has seen them, too; it is the rabbit and the burrow over again. He will escape the dogs yet."

"*Hombre!* what talk! there are troops in every street! How shall he escape? Look for yourself, they are going to shoot the horse."

"And he fights no more—the sword is still. It is the woman's face, *amigo!* They say that he is a good friend of hers—well, she can go to see him garrotted."

"Perhaps she will be garrotted herself, old man."

"Pah! we do not want the woman. Sufficient that we have to marry them."

These troopers, standing idly by the great barricade, told the story aright when they said that a woman's face had stilled the sword in Falconer's hand, and delivered him to his enemies. Until the moment when he had seen the face, it seemed, indeed, that a devil possessed him. Round and round the square he rode, as a gladiator victorious. There were dead men in his path, and men groaning with their wounds. But the gigantic man upon the horse rode on, boyish laughter upon his lips, the memory of the Tenth ever goading him to new effort. Well he knew that the end must come soon. The door of the prison was already open; the scaffold was built. What mattered it then?

He saw the woman's face as he made the circuit of the square for the second time. It thrust itself suddenly upon his view over the serried ranks and the hands upraised to strike him. When last he had seen Isabella, it was at her own house in London, where he

had said that another week would make her his wife. And now! He could read the wild terror in her eyes as she, too, looked over the sea of faces, as she beckoned him to the house. He saw the hands outstretched; he seemed to hear her call him. All else was forgotten as he drove his horse toward the place. An ecstasy of hope spurred him on. She would save him even yet—she who had said, "*Je t'aime*."

"Hush, *amigo*—they are going to shoot the horse. You see, he fights no more. He is thinking of the woman. Fool—they have him now—ah!"

An old trooper, standing upon the pavement, spoke the words. He pointed triumphantly to a burly Spaniard who ran out upon the instant and fired his rifle at the willing horse to whom Falconer owed his life twenty times that night. It fell headlong upon the flags; and falling, pinned the man beneath it. He uttered no cry, nor struggled as the soldiers swarmed about him. But when a woman's scream was heard from the house towards which he had ridden, those who held him saw that he trembled and was afraid at last.

"A brave fight, friends; pity to kill a horse like that!"

"To the devil with the horse! There were a hundred picces offered, old man. It is not every year we have a neck like that to break in the garrotte!"

"God rest his soul; devil or man, he plays the best sword in Spain."

"We shall see how he will play on the scaffold."

"Will it be for to-morrow, think you?"

"For to-morrow—pah! he is an Englishman. It will be at San Sebastian—to the music, old man."

The gossips hurried from the square, for a cold rain

had begun to fall. Soldiers with lanterns were carrying the bodies of the dead to the hills, where the trenches had been dug. The bells of the church tolled a solemn knell ; priests began to say masses for those who had fallen. Every stable, every inn-yard was full of the maimed and wounded, whose groans were the requiem of the night. In the hills, the raindrops glistened upon the blackened uniforms of the dead hussars, and washed the wounds of those dying on the sward. When dawn came timidly down the valley, great birds circled above the forgotten bodies, and the house of Lorenzo the Magnificent was in flames.

And he, who had said that he would make his children kings, lay in the foul straw of the dungeon at Torla, and the soldiers, who spied upon him, answered his prayer for a little water with the cry,—

“ Viva el Rey ! Viva el Rey del Aragon ! ”

But one said,—

“ It will be for next week, rascal. Saint John, what a neck to break ! ”

CHAPTER XLIV

“AT DAWN TWO WILL DIE”

AT sunset on the seventh day after that which historians have called the end of the rebellion in Arragon, General Goya, wearing the uniform of the Spanish Lancers, drove up to the prison of San Sebastian, and was instantly admitted by the keepers of the gate.

“To the cell of the Englishman,” he said curtly, as the warder saluted; and he was conducted immediately across the courtyard to the tower of Santa Isabel, wherein the dungeons are, and the cells of the condemned.

Many watched him as he passed them by—prisoners stooping to their labours, iron-nerved jailers, monks fresh from the cells of the confessed and the tortured (often the same thing in San Sebastian), followed him with curious eyes.

“He has gone to tell the Englishman that he is to die to-morrow,” was the whispered comment; but one of the warders said:

“Not so; he has gone to put the question. There will be squeals in Santa Isabel just now, friends; it is time that we taught these English a lesson.”

The General went on regardless of the curiosity he provoked. Once only he stopped, in a smaller courtyard, before a rough-hewn structure of boards upon which the prison workmen were still busy. A smile

hovered about his face then, for he knew that he stood at the foot of the scaffold.

"The orders are understood, Diego?" he asked the trooper at his side. "They know that there are two to die?"

"It is understood, Excellency. The order came from Madrid to-day."

"And the garrotte?"

"Will be up at dawn."

Goya muttered, "*Bueno*," and entered the gloomy tower. There were men here with torches to light him down the reeking stairs to the dungeons below; but the air was stifling even on the ground floor, and slime oozed on the flags of the fœtid passages. When the door of the Englishman's cell was thrown open, the men seemed to be looking down into some foul pit from which the lid had not been lifted during the centuries.

"There is the Captain, Excellency; he is sleeping. They are pigs for sleep, these English. When I tell him that he is to die, he laughs at me and goes to sleep again. The other is different. They have put the question to him—they are putting it now. You can hear his answers if you will listen!"

A low moaning sound was to be heard in the passage. It rose and fell like some horrible dirge; or was broken by a sharp scream of agony. Goya told himself that they were asking Lorenzo the secrets of his life.

"It is necessary for us to know the truth, and the blockhead is stubborn," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he descended the three steps leading to the floor of Falconer's cell; "we shall see if this other is more reasonable. Be good enough to wake him up, Diego."

The trooper lumbered across the cell and held his torch high that its rays might fall upon the face of the sleeping man. Falconer still wore the uniform of the White Hussars, but it had been bedraggled in mud and slime, and the shoulder straps ripped off by heavy hands. One of the prisoner's arms, moreover, was bound up in a coarse bandage of dirty cloth, and the blood from many a cut and scar congealed upon his weary face. When the trooper shook him uncouthly, crying, "Wake up, blackguard; here is the General," he sat for some minutes staring in bewilderment at the light and at those behind it. Then he saw that his visitor was no other than the terrible Goya, fresh from the scene of a hundred gibbets, and he staggered to his feet and saluted clumsily. Goya, in turn, bade the trooper light the lantern in the cell and then leave them alone.

"I shall be ten minutes," he said; "let them know in the cell of the other, and keep their questions until I come."

He sat down upon the rough stool, and commanded Falconer to sit upon the bed.

"Your quarters are not extensive, Captain," he exclaimed cynically; "I am hoping that you will change them presently."

"As soon as you please, my General. I shall not make any objection. There is an abundance of luxury here which is perfectly deplorable. And your servants are too polite."

Goya smiled grimly.

"It is your own fault, Captain. You have but to say the word and you shall set out for Madrid immediately. Do not blame us if you remain obstinate."

Falconer laughed hardly.

"The old story," he said impatiently; "twenty fools have come here to ask it since yesterday. And you are the twenty-first—pardon, the twenty-first gentleman. What is it that you want of me? The secret of the man who for six months has made you the laughing-stock of Europe? Frankly, I don't know it. I am as ignorant as the rest of you—and that is, very ignorant, my General. If I were a good liar, I would make you up a story. But I am not. I am just a complete fool, and that's the end of it."

Goya twirled his moustache fiercely. Falconer's Spanish was not a finished product. It left the General under the impression that he had been called a liar, and that the Englishman had told him to go to the devil. He restrained his rage with difficulty. He knew that his Government would pay five thousand gold pieces to possess that secret by which Lorenzo had deluded an ignorant peasantry.

While the secret remained, who could say that there would not be a new revolution in Arragon? The importance of his mission alone kept Goya from striking the man whose dauntless spirit even a Spanish prison could not break.

"Come," he said, controlling himself with an effort. "I am not here that you may insult me, Captain; but, if possible, to be of some service to you. Let us smoke a *puro*, and talk of it a little while."

He produced two fine Havannah cigars, and struck a match.

"A king's ransom, General," exclaimed Falconer, when the exquisite odour of the tobacco filled the stinking cell; and then he added quickly: "Have a care, there is straw here, and I imagine that you are not insured. It would be a pity to burn such a collection of

art and vertu, to say nothing of the stool upon which General Goya has sat."

Goya smiled in spite of himself. How could Spain deal with a man who jested even in Santa Isabel—who did not pray to the Saints for help, and could call him, the great Goya, a liar!

"You English are incurable," he said. "You are also sensible. And, being sensible, you will soon see the importance of being reasonable. After all, my friend, what does it matter to you whether one hundred or five pay the penalty for what has happened. You have no interest in Spain or her people. I am sure of that."

Falconer stretched himself on his wretched bed and smoked contentedly.

"You are correct as ever, my General. I don't care a damn either way. What next?"

Goya scented submission, and pursued his task eagerly.

"Since you don't care, the rest is easy, Captain," said he. "Tell me how this rogue managed to be in two places at one time, tell me what his influence over the people was, and I will give you your liberty in twenty hours? We have no quarrel with England or with Englishmen. We desire their friendship. You have only to speak the word, and there is no more Santa Isabel—no more straw and foul air, no more darkness. Moreover, I am authorized by my Government to say that if you will tell us all you know I will pay you one hundred *onzas* of gold and give you a free passago to London."

Falconer sat up and stretched out his hand.

"The *onzas* are mine, General. I will tell you here and now as I have told you before—I know nothing.

If I did, I would see you in your own purgatory before I spoke a word. What next?"

Goya bit his lips. His heavy eyebrows were puckered up as though helping him to a decision. After a little pause he rose and said,—

"The next thing, my friend, is to ask you to come to the courtyard, and to tell me what they are building there."

He called for Diego, and the man returned with his torch. Falconer mounted the stairs painfully, for the damp cell had cramped his limbs and lamed him. It was almost dark when he stood in the courtyard, but many workmen were busy upon the great structure of boards erected there, and it had begun to take the shape of a scaffold.

"Captain," said Goya, "do you see what they are doing?"

Falconer breathed heavily. It was not a breath of fear, but of joy at the sparkling night air which filled his lungs and seemed to bring his youth and courage back to him.

"I see, my General. They are building a scaffold—and devilish badly, too. Any decent squad of sappers would have it up in twenty minutes. I should say that those fellows will take a fortnight."

Goya ground his heel into the gravel.

"It will be finished at midnight," he said in a savage whisper; "the garrotte will be here then, and at dawn two will die."

Falconer puffed at his cigar. He was afraid some one would take it from him.

"Really," he said with a nonchalance he was far from feeling, "and what next, my General?"

Goya beckoned Diego.

"To the cell of Lorenzo," he said, with a Spaniard's love for a dramatic gesture.

"Then the entertainment is finished, General?"

"It is about to begin, señor."

They descended to the reeking depths again; but, passing the open door of Falconer's cell, they continued through the corridor to another apartment, remotely placed, and so thick in its walls that no cries of pain could be heard in the courtyard above. When the door of this terrible place was open, Falconer saw the man of Torla, Lorenzo the Magnificent, stretched upon the floor, and held there by four gigantic warders, who were putting the question to him.

"Once more, if you please," said Goya, thrusting the Englishman forward that he might lose nothing of the spectacle; "the man is dumb: we will see if we cannot cure him."

The four men drew back the arms of the wretched prisoner, and then began to twist them in their sockets. A shriek of agony resounded in the corridor. Falconer reeled back to the door.

"You are devils from hell!" he cried, and, raising his unwounded arm, he struck Goya to the floor.

The General staggered up, pale and bleeding.

"To the cell with him," he snarled. "He shall answer also."

They dragged the man, fighting like one possessed, back to his cell, and closed the door with a clang. Goya stood without, and listened to the oaths and cries. But, when the clamour ceased suddenly, and a sharp scream of pain followed upon it, he hastened from the tower and the prison.

"I must see my chief," he said. "We shall learn nothing from that dog. And it would not do for Europe to know what is going on down there."

CHAPTER XLV

A WOMAN'S VOICE

THE news that Lorenzo the rebel, and the Englishman taken with him in the hour of his defeat, had been condemned, under military law, to death in the citadel of San Sebastian spread quickly through Spain and through Europe. Newsboys cried it with zest in the streets of London; boulevardiers in Paris sipped their absinthe at the doors of cafés and said that no other end was possible; ministers in the Spanish capital turned again to their ordinary occupations, assuring themselves that the trouble was done with. The saying was on every one's lips, "To-morrow Lorenzo will try the garrotte." There could not have been three people in Madrid who remained ignorant of the news. Yet Isabella de Gavarnie was one of these, for none had dared to speak to her.

She had gone to Madrid, straight from the town of Torla, on the morrow of the rout. An old house in the Calle de Toledo sheltered her. Such friends as she had were the nobles who remembered her father's name and honoured it. To these she appealed unceasingly—not for the life of the man her father had sent to save Spain, but for that other, the Englishman, who for her sake now lay in the dungeon of San Sebastian. One and all answered her: "It is impossible." Those who secretly had fostered the rebellion

were the loudest in their assurance. "They dare not let him live—it cannot be."

Seven days of ceaseless work and sleepless nights, of self-reproach and humiliation—these she endured and still hoped on.

"I shall go to the Queen," she said, at last; "she will hear me, for the little King's sake."

Many had promised that they would obtain for her audience at the palace; but the week passed, and the gates were still closed to her. Though she knew it not, the hour for the execution of the rebels was fixed already on the seventh day, as she waited wearily in that gloomy house. But none dared to tell her. The hours dragged on, and she remained alone. Even that old friend of Lorenzo's cause, the Marquès of Santilana, upon whose help and devotion she relied to the last, delayed his visit until dusk was down upon the city, and the icy wind swept over the barren steppes which girdle the Spanish capital. And it was odd that he should have entered her house almost at the very hour when, in distant San Sebastian, Noel Falconer listened to the proposals of the terrible Goya, and refused the life which was offered to him.

The Marquès drove to the Calle de Toledo in a closed carriage. His *capa* covered his face; he entered the house furtively, as though fearing observation. A cause that is dead, he argued, needs no friends. He was very willing to help the dark-eyed Isabella; but none must know that he had been Lorenzo's friend. Her interest in the Englishman he did not understand. And she, even in that hour of surpassing danger, was wise enough to cloak it.

"Señorita, I kiss your hand. You have been expecting me?"

She stood by a great fire of logs when he entered the drawing-room of her house. Her dress was perfect in its simplicity. Diamonds sparkled in her black hair. The flush of colour, unusual to her, magnified the beauty of her face.

"I have watched for you since noon, Marquès," she said, permitting her hand to linger a moment in his. "There can be no news or you would have come. They say in England that no news is good news—if it were so here, in Spain!"

She put the question a little fearfully; but his answer was to be read upon his face before he spoke.

"There is news, señorita," he said quickly, "but it is not news for you to hear."

"You mean, Marquès?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned to stare at the reddening fire.

"I mean that the efforts of your friends are not yet successful."

She uttered an exclamation of relief; but the flush had left her cheeks when next she spoke.

"There is yet time," she said, with dignity, "and my friends will contrive to help me."

"They will leave no stone unturned, señorita, but the hours are few. We must be prepared for anything—even for the worst. You understand that."

He looked at her now, for he felt that she must know all. Her face was quite white; there were heavy black rings round her eyes; but she possessed her self-control to the end.

"I understand everything, Marquès—even that which you keep from me."

Silence fell upon the darkened room. The great logs crackled and spluttered upon the stone hearth;

an old clock ticked laboriously, as though weary of the years it had numbered. When Isabella spoke again, she asked the question which the man had dreaded.

"It is for to-morrow, then, Marquès?"

"For to-morrow, señorita."

"At San Sebastian?"

"As you say, dear lady."

"And the Englishman?"

"They die together, señorita."

She put out a trembling hand to him, he touched it with his lips.

"I thank my friends," she said simply, "I thank you above them all. I shall see the Queen to-night. You will help me, Marquès. Your influence will open all doors. How could I rest here, knowing what to-morrow means! God help me! I think sometimes that I shall never rest again. And I have done so little. A woman's voice, for what does it count when a man is to die? The world laughs at her and talks of men's affairs. But you are not as the others. We will go to the palace together, now at once. The Queen will hear us—she is a woman."

Santillana answered her by buttoning his cape about his shoulders again. Though he did not relish the prospect of going to the palace as the self-proclaimed friend of Isabella de Gavarnie, she forced the *rôle* upon him, and he concealed his reluctance from her.

"Señorita," he said, "I am your servant. We will go to the palace at once."

* * * * *

At the same hour, in distant San Sebastian, a girl knelt in prayer beneath the walls of the great fortress prison which rises grimly above the town and is its

citadel. Alone in the shadows, with the ramparts for her altar, and the challenge of the sentinels for her liturgy, little Giralda, the gipsy, craved of God the life of the man she loved.

And being but a child, the hot tears fell upon her burning face ; and she had faith to believe that to-morrow would bring the answer to her prayer.

In the town below, men wrapped their capes about them closely, for the wind blowing in from the sea was bitterly cold.

"To-morrow the rebels die," they said.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE QUEEN'S KISS

"THE Queen is at vespers, Excellency. It is impossible. Her Majesty will see no one."

"She will see me, señor. Have no doubt of it. We shall wait until the service is done. It is a State affair of great urgency. And you will come to my house to-morrow to let me thank you."

The lackey grinned, and showed his teeth. He guarded the private entrance to the royal palace at Madrid, and he knew the Marquès of Santillana very well indeed.

"Pass on, Excellency," he replied, with a tremendous bow. "I shall do myself the honour to wait upon you in the morning." And then to himself he said, "But you will not see the Queen, all the same."

Santillana mounted the great staircase quickly. He looked often at the closely veiled woman at his side, and told himself that the errand was a desperate one. It might even be that it would imperil his own safety and that of her he sought to befriend. But he would not proclaim himself a coward at the eleventh hour, and so he went on. When he reached the corridor above—a corridor leading to the doors of the private chapel—the first person who confronted him was Gaspar de Ribera, the Minister of the Interior.

"Ah, *mon vieux*, you are going to church! It is a fête day, then."

Santillana, thus greeted, raised his hand warningly.

"Hush!" he said. "It is an affair of importance, and I must see the Queen. You must help me, Ribera."

"I—*Santissima Virgen!* I help you to see the Queen! You dream, Marquès! She is in chapel now, and in another hour she will be at dinner."

Santillana drew him aside.

"We must see her, nevertheless, my friend. Do you know whom I bring here?"

Ribera looked over his shoulder at the veiled figure standing motionless in the shadows of the corridor.

"I know nothing, Marquès."

"Then I will tell you. That is Isabella de Gavarnie, who has come here to speak for the rebel and his friends."

Ribera started.

"The woman here—in the palace!" he said. "Does she wish to go to San Sebastian too?"

Santillana took his arm, and walked on.

"I thought it wise to bring her," he said; "she will have secrets to tell which you may wish to hear. And she will tell them only to the Queen. You understand, my friend—I have played the policeman in this case, but I expect my hostages to be respected. Let the woman have three minutes with Her Majesty, and possibly you will find out all that you have been guessing at for the last six months."

Ribera began to show his interest.

"I must think of it," he said. "Let her wait in the chapel; I will come to you when the priest has done."

He disappeared into an ante-chamber, and the Marquès returned to Isabella.

"We shall succeed!" he whispered triumphantly. "He is the one man in Spain who can obtain us audience. You came at a lucky hour. We are to go to the chapel and wait for him. Of course you will be able to tell them something if they should promise you your friend's life! These things do not matter to a man who will sit in the garrotte at dawn to-morrow if we remain silent. Tell all you know freely. It is your duty."

"I know nothing," she said simply; "there is nothing to tell."

The Marquès made a gesture of impatience.

"You are a woman, and you are clever," he said; "you will know how to temporise. Remember, he dies at dawn if your cleverness cannot save him."

She had begun to tremble as the truth came to her. That very secret, which now would have purchased the life of her lover, was the secret for which she had sent him to Spain. There was no weapon in all her armoury but the weapon of a woman's sympathy. She would appeal to the Queen as a woman who loves to a woman who has loved.

There were two guards, with naked swords in their hands, at the door of the chapel. Courtiers loitered in the corridor, and stared at the stately figure of the woman as she passed them by. Men in gorgeous white and scarlet uniforms asked each other who she was, and why she waited there. When it became known that Isabella do Gavarnie, the friend of Lorenzo the rebel, was in the palace, the interest was unconcealed. Men followed her to the chapel, and knelt to stare at her. A whispered buzz of talk arose in the corridor, and was to be heard even above the voice of the priest. "She is here to tell the man's

secrets," was the common opinion. Others who knew more said, "She is here to save the Englishman."

Isabella saw none of these people. She knelt in the chapel before the brilliantly lighted altar, and her mind went back to Torla—to the last dreadful day when she beheld Falconer hunted in the great square, and he had stretched out his arms to her. Her vivid imagination depicted him then in his cell at San Sebastian; and again the imploring hands were raised, that she would save him from the dawn and that which the dawn would bring. Often she looked through the heavy oaken screen, which stood between the royal pew and those in waiting, as though to read the Queen's face; but her search was vain. Save for the countless tapers upon the high altar, the chapel was in darkness. The solemn chanting of the Litany was to her as some dirge for those about to die. "God," she prayed, "give me words to speak—tell me how to save him."

The chanting ceased; a priest, clad in a cloth of gold cope, lifted the jewelled monstrance and blessed the people with the Host. A bell was struck three times, clouds of incense floated up above the twinkling tapers and hung about the great painting behind them. Then the choir sang the "Laudate Dominum." The Court, on the altar side of the screen, passed through a small door to the Queen's apartments beyond. Isabella felt some one touch her upon the shoulder. She looked up to find the Marquès waiting for her.

"We are to go to the private apartments," he whispered. "It must be now, or not at all. Remember what I said, and promise to conceal nothing from them. It is your only chance."

They left the chapel in a press of those whose daily work it was to loiter in the draughty corridors, and to imagine that they were serving the Queen thereby. Men in superb uniforms rubbed shoulders with the lackeys at the doors of the ante-chambers. Government officials were cheek by jowl with priests and monks. A babble of talk arose and mingled with the rolling notes of the organ. Isabella saw many of these salaried loiterers point at her as she passed. A woman's vanity helped her to bear the ordeal. She walked among them as some queen returned to her dominion. Grief had not robbed her of the power to win men's admiration.

"It is here," said the Marquès, as he passed from the corridor to an ante-chamber; "we are to wait until Ribera comes. He is with the Queen now. If you see her, it will be for a moment only. Make the best use of your time, for we shall never have another chance."

Isabella could hear her heart beating. Save for an usher at the second door, they were alone in the ante-chamber. A wan light fell upon her face and magnified its pallor. The emblems of the comfortless life of a Court were all about her—of a great world in which men and women forgot their humanity, and served a gilded stage. What hope could she have in such a world—she who had come to plead as a woman who loves to a woman who has loved?

"Her Majesty will see you now, Marquès. This way, if you please."

An equerry in the uniform of the guards beckoned them from the further door. Isabella remembered afterwards that she passed through many rooms—some a-glitter with hangings of gold and red, some

walled with great mirrors, in which she beheld the figure of a woman whose veil was cast aside and whose face was ghastly pale. Then—how she knew not—she was kneeling at another woman's feet, and a flood of incoherent words poured from her lips.

The Queen awaited them in a chamber of audience usually sacred to ambassadors. The little King of Spain stood upon her right hand; there were ladies in waiting and equerries to complete the royal circle. A few words from Señor de Ribera served for presentation. They were scarce spoken before Isabella, the proud, had fallen upon her knees to kiss the Queen's hand and to pour forth her incoherent prayer for clemency.

"Your Majesty, I come to beg his life—the life of the Englishman. He has meant no harm to Spain; the English are the friends of our country. They will not be friends if this man dies. It was for my sake he came here. You will not let him die. Oh, God! you cannot let him die!"

The excitement, which she had long controlled, now mastered her. All that she had meant to say was forgotten in the stress of the moment. She had no shame to plead for the man she loved, and to forget the other whose wife she was to have been. She lifted a burning face to those who stared at her in silent amazement.

"As you have loved, remember one who loves, and grant her prayer."

An embarrassing silence fell upon the room. Santillana bit his lip, and silently cursed the folly which had brought him upon such an errand. The young equerrie tittered behind the Queen's back. The little King drew nearer to his mother, and put his hand in

hers. Ribera, the Minister, showed his contempt for the kneeling woman openly.

"Her Majesty has understood," he said at length, "that you have important intelligence to convey to us concerning the rebel, Lorenzo de la Cruz, and those who abetted him. It will be time enough to appeal to Her Majesty's clemency when the other matters are disposed of. We did not understand, señorita, that you wished to speak of the Englishman, whose case the Government has already considered."

Isabella regained her self-control with a tremendous effort.

"Señor," she said, in a low voice, "the Englishman has been my friend; Her Majesty will forgive me if I speak of him. For my sake he came to Spain to discover the secrets which you now ask me to disclose. We failed, señor; but Her Majesty's clemency may yet allow us to succeed. If you grant these unhappy men their lives, it shall be to make them true friends of Spain. Their death will win you many new enemies in Arragon. Mercy will win you friends. A martyr's cause is ever a strong cause, señor. The life of Noel Falconer is a poor exchange for the friendship of England. You will not imperil that friendship—you cannot imperil it by refusing the pardon I ask for this man and for the other."

She spoke slowly and with thought, permitting her emotion to master her no more. Though she knew it not, she had put the case to them exactly as Ribera himself had put it to the Cabinet yesterday—a simple case opening up plain issues. And there was that in her voice and the stately pride of her manner to appeal to a woman. People said afterwards that there were tears in the Queen's eyes when Isabella had

spoken. But Ribera—angry at her refusal to tell that which he wished to know, convinced that, if she would, she could explain the mystery of Lorenzo's life—brought the audience to an abrupt termination.

"Señorita," he said, "Her Majesty is not here to listen to a subject already discussed by her Ministers. Either you have intelligence for us, or you have not. If you have not, it is a presumption for you to come to us at all. I beg you, for the last time, deal plainly with us, and answer the question I put to you."

Isabella buried her face in her hands.

"I know nothing," she said; "I have nothing to disclose."

Ribera shrugged his shoulders.

"I must apologize to Your Majesty," he said.

The Queen bent down to the kneeling woman and kissed her upon both cheeks.

"God give you strength to bear your trouble, sister," she said very gently; "I shall remember you in my prayers."

The procession swept from the room. Isabella had a moment's vision of a woman turning back to look at her with a piteous gaze, which touched her heart. Then she was out in the court again; her own carriage drove up; she was listening to Santillana's farewell.

"*Addios*, señorita," he said. "I have done my best; but, forgive me, you were not clever. What woman in love ever is?"

He shut the door, and the carriage drove off. She sank back in the cushions, and restrained her tears no more.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE PHILOSOPHER

ENGLISH horses drew her carriage swiftly back to the Calle de Toledo. It was dark then, and the icy-cold wind swept upon the flaring gas-jets of the cafés and played with them merrily. Men, whose cloaks were drawn close about their ears, hurried to their homes and to play. Those, who cried the news, lurked in every vantage ground of shelter. There was scarce a being in the city who had not said twice that day: "Lorenzo is to die, and the Englishman with him."

Isabella heard the cry as she shivered in her carriage, and knew that all was indeed finished. To-morrow the man, who had kissed her lips and held her in his strong arms, would sleep the eternal sleep. Nevermore would she hear his voice or touch his hand. Her own future, pregnant of surpassing loneliness—she would not think of that. A great longing to set off to San Sebastian began to possess her. She thought that they would let her enter the cell and stand by him in that last dreadful hour. No longer could she hope for mercy or for pardon. Santillana had said that she was not clever. But she could not so charge herself. She knew that a lie would not have saved her lover's life.

The gloomy Calle de Toledo, dark and inhospitable as the Spanish nobles who live in it, was a channel for the wind when she left her carriage and stood for an

instant on the steps of her own house. A man, with his cape drawn close about his face, waited for her there and came out of the shadows to speak to her.

"So you have failed, madame," he said, with a little laugh which grated upon her ear.

She turned quickly to see a thick-set, broad-shouldered man, veiled by a heavy cloak; nevertheless, one whose voice seemed very familiar to her, and whose eyes were the eyes of one she knew.

"Who are you?" she cried, concealing her fear and wonder, yet drawing back from his touch involuntarily.

He opened his cloak and showed his face.

"Great God!" she said; "it is the Prince."

The man laughed again, but observing that she was swaying, as one about to faint, he gripped her by the arm and drew her into the hall of the house.

"Madame," he said, with a strange firmness, "this is no time for the friends of Lorenzo de la Cruz to forget where he is, and what is about to happen to him. Let your servants bring us a little wine, and I will then tell you why I have come here."

Isabella pressed her hand to her eyes and looked at the man again. She thought at first that her reason was leaving her. The voice of the man, the face, the gesture, they were those of Lorenzo, the rebel, then awaiting death in the prison of San Sebastian. And he was here in Madrid, in her own house! He called her "madame"!

"Oh, my God, help me! help me!" she muttered; "do not let me lose my reason."

A surpassing effort of will alone enabled her to reach the great drawing-room above, and to strike a gong there. Pedro, her servant, answered the summons, and brought a flask of red wine. When she had drunk a

glass of the wine and Pedro had left the room, the stranger uncloaked.

"Madame," he said, "forgive my wish to remain unknown here. There are reasons."

He stood where the flickering firelight could fall upon his face; and did not conceal his enjoyment at her perplexity. She stared at him as she would have stared at a spectre.

"Who are you?" she asked again, for a terror of the unseen was now upon her. "You have the face and voice of Lorenzo of Arragon, yet I know that you are not Lorenzo."

"Madame," he said, "I am his brother Francisco."

There was silence between them for some while. If he could have read her thoughts, he would have learnt that she was wondering why this man had come to her when a knowledge of his existence was too late to save Falconer's life.

"Yes," she said musingly, when some minutes had passed, "you could be no one else. And you are the mystery, señor."

"I am the mystery, madame, as you say."

Her pretty chin rested upon her hand as she sat at the table, unable to take her eyes from his face.

"It is you who have played the part of that other! It must have been. Surely we were all very simple not to have thought of it, señor?"

"Simple things are rarely thought of, madame. No one in Spain has ever heard my name. I have lived all my life on the island of Majorca. Politics do not interest me. I am a philosopher. If I have consented to abet my brother in his madness, it is because it amused me to do so—and paid me. Philosophers love gold pieces as much as other people—even if they do not often get

so many of them. But they do not put their necks in the garrotte; they leave that to their dupes."

He laughed again good-humouredly. Some cynical man of the world appeared to be speaking. But Isabella said to herself: "The secret, the secret—it would have saved his life."

"Señor," she said, at last, "you did not come here to tell me these things. There is another reason. Does a philosopher jest when his brother is at the foot of the scaffold?"

"Not at all, madame. He acts as I am acting to-night."

"You mean?"

"That I have come here to save my brother's life."

He turned to the table, and with a word of apology helped himself to wine. Then he drew a chair near to her, and began to speak very earnestly.

"Madame Isabella," he said, assuming the tone of an old friend, "is it not a fact that you were about to become my brother's wife?"

She bowed her head. She was glad that the darkness of the room hid her burning cheeks from his sight.

"That being the case," he continued, unaware of her embarrassment, "I have done well in coming here. They tell me in the newspapers that the Spanish Government is willing to give much for the secret which enabled my brother to impose, not only upon the ignorant peasants of Arragon, but even upon educated persons in Europe. While that secret was of any service to Lorenzo, I kept it faithfully. I will not conceal it from you that it paid me to keep it. If he desired to be seen in Madrid, or in Paris, or in London upon a certain day, I went there for him. I have ridden at the head of his regiment—always, my dear madame, in a different direction from that

taken by the civil guards, believe me. I laboured under no delusions. My brother believed himself a second Napoleon. I encouraged him in that belief—and kept his cash-book. The likeness between us, as you see, is little less than extraordinary. To-night we will make use of his secret for the last time by selling it to the Government of Spain. The price will be my brother's life. You understood me, madame?"

She rose from her seat, quivering with excitement.

"Señor, I understand you. Yet why delay? There is not an hour to lose. Let us go at once."

The cynical smile returned to his face.

"My dear lady," he said, "much as I love my brother Lorenzo, a hundred thousand gold pieces would not take me to a minister's house this night. Say rather that you will go—not at once, but in an hour's time, when I shall be in the mail for Seville, and shall have looked upon Madrid for the last time."

A shadow of despair crossed her face.

"I have been to them already," she said. "They will not listen to me for the second time."

"Indeed they will listen to you very gladly, madame; or if they do not, and I contemplate that possibility, you may tell them that their refusal will bring a second Lorenzo to Arragon before the rains of spring. The matter is in your hands. I am speaking to an honourable woman, who will sell my brother's secret for nothing but his life. I trust Lorenzo's safety to her readily. She will be faithful to him. She will act as for the life of her husband. It is understood, madame?"

He rose and cloaked himself again. Her answer was a whispered word he scarce could hear:

"It is understood, señor."

* * * * *

She counted his footsteps across the courtyard without. The wind moaned fitfully beneath the eaves of the great gaunt houses. The old clock ticked off the minutes laboriously. They were precious minutes—the minutes of the last night left to the man she loved.

And she was about to set out to save the life of another.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE LIFE OF ONE

GASPAR DE RIBERA, Minister of the Interior, angry that he should have made such a fool of himself at the palace, dined in haste at his own house and then returned to his office by the Puerta del Sol. He knew that there would be little leisure for him that night. For Spain was about to garrotte an Englishman, and the British ambassador was alert and acting.

He returned to his office, and found Felipe, his secretary, awaiting him impatiently. Being a man who refused to flurry himself, he drew off his gloves very deliberately and cut a cigar with great nicety, before he would so much as put a question to his subordinate.

"Is there anything fresh, Felipe?"

"Another despatch from his Excellency, señor."

Ribera fixed his eyeglass, and took up the bulky paper.

"These Englishmen are insupportable," he said savagely. "They do not know how to wait. There is no to-morrow for them; it is to-day, to-day. A nation that has its shutters always down is not to be suffered. Make a note of that, Felipe. I will repeat it to the deputies."

Felipe made a note of it in a little red book wherein the witticisms of his master were recorded. Ribera himself read the despatch from the English ambassador

to the last line, and then laid it on the table with a sigh.

"I must see the others," he said; "there will be trouble with England, over a mad hussar who comes to Spain to cut our throats. But we are not to be bullied. Certainly not. We will garrotte twenty Englishmen if we please, and the English Government may squeal as much as it likes. You hear, Felipe? I am not to be bullied. Then order my carriage. I must see my chief."

Felipe left the room, only to return immediately.

"Your pardon, Excellency, there is a lady in the waiting-room. She demands——"

"Demands," exclaimed Ribera.

"As I say, she demands a hearing. She will not be refused. She has sent me back, Excellency—she insists!"

"And her name is?"

"Madame de Gavarnie."

Ribera put down his hat. The woman was back again, then. He argued rightly that she would not make a fool of him for the second time.

"Show Madame de Gavarnie in," he said. "I wish to see her alone."

Isabella entered the room with a firm step. A thick veil cloaked the pallor of her face. She bowed to Ribera, and seated herself without waiting for an invitation.

"Señor," she said quickly, "I have come here to sell you Lorenzo's secret."

Ribera nodded his head. The hour was a triumph for him; but he was too well schooled in the diplomatic art to betray himself. When he had fixed his glass, and stared a little while at the speaker, he answered her:

"And the price, madame, of your secret?"

"The life of the man that secret concerns, and of the Englishman now condemned with him."

Ribera nodded his head again. He took up a pen and traced some lines upon a paper. That was to give him time for reflection. Presently he said:

"What security have I that the secret is worth the payment, madame?"

She was breathing with difficulty, for the tension of the situation quickened her heart and almost suffocated her.

"You have nothing but my word, señor."

He smiled doubtfully.

"Madame," he said, rising and facing her, "if I find that you are speaking the truth, I will give you the life of one of these men. It is for you to make the choice."

She began to tremble in every limb. To choose—between the man she loved and the man who had loved her! She stood up. The lights in the room danced before her eyes.

"I cannot choose—I cannot," she said despairingly.

"Then let us say that it shall be the Spaniard—you agree with that, madame. The Spaniard is to go free, the Englishman to the garrotte. That is your wish."

She tried to answer him, but reeled in a swoon. Ribera caught her in his arms, and called for Felipe.

"Felipe, Felipe, a glass of wine quickly. Madame has fainted."

But to himself he said:

"It is useful sometimes to know with whom a woman is in love." •

CHAPTER XLIX

"THERE ARE SIX HOURS YET"

NOEL FALCONER awoke from a troubled sleep when the great clock within the citadel of San Sebastian was striking the hour of twelve. He counted the lingering, sonorous notes, and told himself that never on earth again would he hear a clock strike twelve. Nothing now, either of personal suffering or of regret, was of moment to him. The terrible pains which racked his limbs, the stifling, humid cell, the foul straw upon which he lay—at dawn these things would trouble him no more. It was, in some sort, a satisfaction to remember that his death would cheat the Spaniards of their prey. They would break his neck in the garrotte, it is true; but when that was done their amusement would be ended, and he had his compensation—for he had struck the bloody Goya upon the face, and had seen him bleeding at his feet.

Earlier that day, and during many days and nights since the *débauche*, his loneliness had been his worst enemy. He told himself that there was no one in all Europe that night who cared whether he lived or died. The men, who had been his friends in the old time, which among them had remembered him or sent him a word of sympathy? And the woman he had loved—who once had said, "Take me to your home." She was silent too. He clenched his hands when he

remembered those sunny hours in Paris; he shut the vision of her sweet face from his eyes, and would not let his lips mutter her name.

It had been in his mind from the first that if he must die, he would die as an Englishman and a soldier. Somehow or other, the outcast still wore the pride of the regiment which had forgotten him. At heart he was the hussar of old. Often in the darkness of that cell he saw himself riding out with the troop which had loved him. Triumphs of forgotten years were recalled and lived over again. He did not fear the aftermath of death. He knew that there was no stain upon his honour; and those other sins—well, the angels did not keep the books in Carey Street.

He heard the great clock strike twelve, and turned uneasily upon his bed of straw. The pain, which torture had inflicted, lingered, and was almost unendurable. Yet movement was in some way fascinating, for to-morrow the eternal stillness would begin. The hand he could then raise at his will, what power would raise it when the sun shone again upon San Sebastian! The brain which could think and suffer, whence would come the new breath of life to quicken it! Such fears of the imagination were not to be put aside even by one who had been death's neighbour often. If the end had but come in the field of war—if he could have fallen with those whose bodies still lay in the mountain glades above Torla, it would have been different. But to sit in a chair while a Spaniard broke his neck! The shame of that death was intolerable!

They had left him alone at ten o'clock, when they set a loaf of coarse, black bread and a tin cup of sour wine by his bed, and told him mockingly that his breakfast would be punctual. He stretched out his hand

now for the wine, and something leaped up from the straw and went pattering to the wall. Horror of the cell and of the vermin, which crawled over his body, grew upon him again, and was not to be shaken off. He closed his eyes and tried to force sleep; but she refused her befriending rest. He heard the clock strike again, and every stroke of the quarter chiming was as a note of mockery. The intense darkness weighed upon him as the cloak of death itself. He had the strange thought that he lay already in his grave—a living man deep down under the earth, which stifled his cries. He believed that he could hear the footsteps of men and women who walked upon his grave up there where the stars shone; who breathed God's air and talked of love and life. When the gaoler opened the door of his cell, and the garish light of a lantern flickered in his eyes, he could not suppress an exclamation. The light was welcome as the light of day itself.

"My God!" he said to the gaoler, "I dreamed that you had buried me."

The man laughed at so good a jest.

"To-morrow, my captain, to-morrow! There are six hours yet—six hours for you and the other rogue to talk together. Saint John, you need not be afraid. It is nothing, this garrotte. A turn of the screw—so—and crack goes the neck, as an egg that is broken. I have seen many a man die like that. It is a child's death, and they will give you the wine. That makes the head dance—there is a drug in it, you understand?"

Falconer rubbed his eyes. The light of the lantern, dim as it was, hurt them.

"I shall get along without your wine, friend," he

said. "Is it nothing more than that you wish to tell me?"

The gaoler set down his lantern, and put his hands upon his hips. He surveyed the prisoner with a cunning eye.

"I do not tell anything. It is not my business; not at all. I am not to be bribed into any such thing. The Governor would give me three days' bread and water if he found me talking with you. Therefore I am silent."

Falconer laughed.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"It is all, señor, unless you have friends."

"Friends!"

"Certainly, friends to whom you would wish to write a little letter, and who would give a poor man a hundred pesetas for carrying it. You understand me?"

Falconer sighed, and sank back upon his bed.

"I have no friends," he said.

The gaoler picked up his lantern, and kicked the straw contemptuously.

"*Anda usted*, what blackguards we entertain, nowadays, the Governor and I," he said testily; "there are not twenty pesetas among a hundred of them. Get up, rogue, and follow me. We will go to the barber, who will show you how your hair should be cut."

"I am to leave here?" Falconer asked.

"Did I not say so? Mother of God! I shall send for the whip presently, blackguard. Do not you see that you are keeping me waiting?"

The prisoner struggled to his feet. A vague excitement trembled upon his nerves. It was the beginning of the end, then? When next he slept it would be that sleep which knows no waking.

"You are quite ready to go?" the Spaniard asked at the door.

"Quite ready."

"And there is no one to whom you wish to send a letter?"

"No one."

"No lady?"

Falconer started. It was as though some one had whispered Isabella's name in his ear. The Spaniard watched his face expectantly. When he saw the expression upon it, he put down the lantern quickly, and laughed.

"Ha!" he said, "there is always the woman. I have pencil and paper, Excellency. The lantern will help you to write. A hundred pesetas—your Excellency would not offer me less."

Falconer took the paper, and leant against the wall. He was breathing quickly. His benumbed hands would scarce hold the pencil. In that instant the woman's lips seemed to touch his. Her arm was about him supportingly. Tears of weakness and pain started to his eyes. The words that he wrote were almost indecipherable.

"Good-night, *chère* Isabella; it is for to-morrow."

That was all, with her address in Torla upon the outside of the sheet. He folded it twice, and handed it back to the gaoler, who thrust it into his pocket with a grunt of satisfaction. A moment later the Spaniard had it out again, and was scanning it eagerly.

"Your Excellency did not forget the hundred pesetas?"

Falconer took the letter back.

"A thousand pardons," he said; "I will remember it now."

The Spaniard held the lantern up that the prisoner might write again. He watched every letter of the added message, but it was written in a tongue of which he did not understand a single word. For Falconer's postscriptum was in English, and it said:

"Let your grooms thrash the ruffian who brings this letter. He has been my worst enemy here."

The Spaniard pocketed the note with a grin of satisfaction.

"You are quite sure it was a hundred pesetas, Excellency?"

"It is more than that, my friend. Only wait and see."

"I am your Excellency's servant. This way, if you please. You go to meet your friend. There is no more darkness now. All that is done with. And there will be wine for you to drink. Did I not say it was nothing, the garrotte?"

He led the way to the corridor, at each end of which stood a sentinel with a loaded rifle at his shoulder. The way lay up to the ground floor of Santa Isabel, to a great stone room, wherein the last hours of those who must pay the ultimate penalty that Spain could enact were spent. Here a great fire of logs burned on a vast hearth; here, watched by burly warders with swords at their belts, sat Lorenzo de la Cruz, conscious neither of his environment nor of their presence.

Falconer entered the room with a firm step. His fetters jangled upon the flags; it was an agony to walk, but he suffered it that he might show them how an Englishman dies. At first he did not see Lorenzo; the glare of light blinded his eyes, the warming fire

drew him towards it as one come home after a war with a bitter night of sleet and cold. But when he was half-way across the room, the silent man at the table stood up and spoke for the first time since he had come to Santa Isabel.

"It is my English friend," he said; "God be thanked!"

And so the hands of the two were clasped—there on the threshold of the scaffold.

The gaolers turned to their cards again. They had brought the prisoners together to hear them talk. In that arched room of stone every whisper could be heard. It was their last attempt to learn the secret of Lorenzo's life. Some word to the Englishman would give the key for which Spain waited so impatiently. That was their argument and their hope.

"My English friend!"

All the heart of the ruined man seemed to speak. He stood there; he who had sworn to make his children kings; he at whose name Europe had trembled; and this Englishman alone remained to clasp his hand. Tears started to his eyes. He had been friendless so long—yet one was left.

"Captain," he said, "I thank God that we meet again, even in this place. You know that it is for to-morrow?"

"They have just told me so, Prince."

"Then we shall not talk about it. We have the night before us; why should we waste it in sleep? There will be time enough for that to-morrow."

He drew the other's arm through his and began to walk up and down the room. He still wore the long grey overcoat, but the buttons had been cut from it, and the mud of Torla was caked upon the skirts.

Always of pallid face, Falconer thought that seven days had transformed him almost beyond recognition. The wax of the candles burning upon the table was not whiter than his sunken cheeks and shrivelled hands. In his eyes you might behold the look of one who has wrestled long with pain, and is still the victim of it. He walked with difficulty, dragging heavy fetters at his ankles. At the second turn, when he reached the corner of the room in which stood a rude plank bed, he dropped upon the mattress from sheer fatigue, and sat there panting for his breath.

"It is the cold and the wet—they make a woman of me, Captain," he said in piteous apology. "And our friends *là bas* help them. I shall be well again just now. Do not think about it."

Falconer drew up a stool and sat down beside him.

"They are devils," he said, "to bring a man to your condition."

Lorenzo laughed bitterly.

"It will not matter—to-morrow," he exclaimed; "they do not know any better, Captain. We Spaniards are cruel by instinct, as you Englishmen are kind. Some day we shall not be so. Some day Spain will awake and remember her gifts. But the time is not yet. Ignorance is a rock which you cannot blast with the reformer's powder, *amigo*. Many picks must work through many generations. But I would have saved Spain if she had listened to my voice. The day will come when her children will remember my name and honour me."

The old pride asserted itself again. That side of the man which craved for notoriety was speaking. The warders, over the cards, pricked up their ears and listened as they played.

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"I would have saved Spain, Captain," he continued presently, "if she would have saved herself. That which I claimed to do I have done. Our children's children will tell each other of the White Hussars, and of their glory. Our names are written for ever in the history of this country. It is nothing to me that I must die at dawn. Those that loved me will love me still. I do not believe that I shall be separated from them because my neck is broken in the garrotte. The hereafter must be, Captain; it is as true as our minds which reveal it to us. And I believe in God. How could it be otherwise since I am here!"

Falconer shook his head. A hussar is no sure guide when it comes to theology, and his creed had differed every time he repeated it.

"There can be nothing worse than death," he said impulsively; "I am sure that it will be well with me to-morrow. It is of the other I think. But we will not talk of her, Prince."

Lorenzo smiled, but the smile passed instantly.

"Ah, there is always the 'other.' What is that man worth who has no link to bind him to the home he leaves? My life has been a race with fate, Captain. But the 'other' has come to me, nevertheless."

He lay back upon the bed and closed his eyes while a spasm of pain quivered upon his face. Helpless there and wrecked and broken, the charm of the voice and of the man were unalterable. Falconer thought that he spoke of Isabella, and wondered that she should unite them in such a strange bond. His heart went out in pity to the ruined man. He forgot the dreamer whose dream had sent the angel of death winging over Spain.

"We shall be remembered, at any rate," he said presently; "there is one in Spain who will never forget our names."

Lorenzo raised himself upon his elbow. He spoke in a whisper. He was like a man telling a good jest.

"There are two, my friend," he said.

Falconer looked at him earnestly.

"Two!"

"As I say—do you forget little Giralda, the gipsy?"

"Why should I think of her?"

"Because, if I had lived, she would have helped me to rule Spain."

He laughed aloud at the other's surprise; but remembering the mockery of laughter, sat up and put his hand in that of his English friend.

"Isabella was necessary to me," he said. "While she could help me to win Arragon, I held her to her promise. But we do not take a woman to our house because her father has wished it. She did not love me, Captain—and for me there was the 'other.' You understand!"

Silence fell upon the room, for both were thinking. The gaolers continued to play with apparent interest. When Lorenzo spoke again it was in a very low voice, as one dwelling upon momentous things.

"Captain," he said quickly, "if God should will that one of us escape the day, let it be a bond between us that we will care for this child. There is money at Torla to buy for her, and for him who shall help her, a home to surpass the palaces of Spain. It lies——"

He bent forward to whisper the word; but drew back and left it unspoken. One of the card-players had left his seat by the hearth and come over to the

bed. When the man saw that he was observed, he walked away again, feigning indifference.

"Our friends play their game with one eye, you see," said Lorenzo, watching the burly gaoler, "but we shall watch the other. Another time, Captain——"

Falconer shook his head.

"On the scaffold, Prince."

"Perhaps. God knows. There is two o'clock striking. Dawn will come at six. We have four hours yet to talk, my friend; four hours to say to each other 'courage.' You do not wish to sleep? Neither do I. Sleep is for those who must wake presently. And we are not to wake. It will be good to rest."

He lay back for very weakness, and put out his hand as a blind man might have done. Falconer held it, and watched his haggard face. The suffering of a life, which rarely had known joy, was written there. Even when he slept (and all his wish could not keep sleep from his eyes), that seal of pain was stamped there as a seal which should never be broken.

At dawn, when the door of the condemned cell in Santa Isabel was opened, the monks who entered found the two still thus—the great hussar watching over the weary rebel as a father over a child.

"He has courage, this Englishman," they said.

But the gaolers said:

"Wait until he is outside. We shall see how he can die."

CHAPTER L

DAWN

A GREAT bell within the citadel of San Sebastian began to toll dolefully when the first grey light of dawn was winging through the silent streets of the fortress town below. Falconer heard the knell very clearly when the door of his cell was opened and the Dominican monks entered it. He remembered that once he had listened to the bell of St. Sepulchre's Church, by Newgate Prison, when some poor wretch was to die upon the scaffold there. He had stood for a moment to watch the black flag above the prison, and to tell himself what a night that must have been which the doomed man had passed. And now a bell was tolling for him. Death was not so terrible as the heralds of death, he thought. That slow, monotonous note made him shudder.

He was standing when the monks came to the bedside; but Lorenzo still slept. The priests looked at him a little curiously, wondering, perhaps, how he would receive them.

"You know why we are here, brother?"

He bowed to them and drew back a step.

"I can imagine it, gentlemen."

"Then you will let us speak to you of our blessed Faith?"

"I am quite powerless to prevent you, gentlemen."

The elder of the monks sighed.

"There is no belief left in the world now," he said; "it has gone away with the railway. And you English are strange people. You die as you live—indifferent to the end. Well, I could have wished it otherwise, señor, but I am none the less your friend for that. Command me and you will find that I can forget the habit I wear when a brother is in distress. If there is any one in your own England to whom you would wish to send a message, trust me as you would trust a father."

He had the face of a good man, and Falconer reproached himself afterwards that he answered him so curtly. In truth, he scarce knew what he was doing. The cold grey light in the cell, the figure of the sleeping man, the brown habits of the monks, the sound of drums rolling in the courtyard without, confused him. It was as though he acted a part in a stage-play, but acted it unconsciously. He could not believe that he was to die when a few minutes had passed. His young life within him was strong and awakened in that hour of morning. A strange excitement quickened the blood in his veins. He *would* live, he said.

"I thank you, my father," he exclaimed, turning from the old monk brusquely; "but my sins are so many you would never remember them. And I have no friends in England. Our friend there may atone for my shortcomings. It would be a charity to let him sleep on, but I suppose the time for that has passed."

"It has passed, indeed," was the monk's reply; "he has not ten minutes to live, señor."

Falconer went and stood at the window, and watched them wake the sleeping man. Lorenzo sat

up at once when the monk laid a finger upon his shoulder. He shielded the light from his eyes and stared round the room helplessly.

"You are here, Captain?" he asked; "it is you whom I see?"

Falconer stepped into the ring of grey light which fell through the lattice and answered him,—

"I am here, Prince."

"And these others?"

The monk held up a crucifix and pointed to it.

"My son," he said, "the hour has come. Look up to God while you have eyes to see."

Weak and faltering until that moment, Lorenzo stood up when the monk spoke.

"What I have done," he said, "I am prepared to answer to my God for. My life is lived, father. Ten minutes upon my knees now will not make it a better life or a worse one. The work of such as you lies in the hills of Torla, where are the lonely women and children. Go to them, in God's name, and give the starving bread."

The eyes of the monk flashed angrily.

"If there are starving women in Torla," he said, "you took the bread from them. If there are orphans, yours was the hand that struck the fathers down. Will you go to the Gate of Death with these things on your soul, my brother? Will you stand before the throne of God with defiance upon your lips? It shall not be; it cannot be. I offer you the life eternal—the gift of Christ, whose voice you will hear before the clock strikes again. You must hear me."

He fell upon his knees and began to recite the Litany for those about to die. Lorenzo turned from him contemptuously.

"Men live in deeds, and not in words," he said. "My page is written; no prayer will blot it out. If it is a satisfaction to you to say that I died in the faith, you are welcome to that, my father. At least, there will be no one to contradict you."

He laughed bitterly, and crossed the room to Falconer's side. The drums were still rolling in the courtyard; the bell of the church tolled incessantly. They could hear the tramp of many feet; a company of infantry-men filed into the prison yard and took up station there. Anon the door of the room was opened, and the Governor of San Sebastian entered. Others were with him, men in the uniforms of the lancers and hussars. Curiosity drew them there. They wished to see the faces of those who were about to mount the steps of the scaffold.

"Gentlemen," said the Governor, speaking with some suggestion of pity, "I am here to tell you that there is no reprieve, and that the Queen refuses you a pardon. At the same time, Her Majesty offers you, even at this hour, the same clemency she offered you a week ago. A full confession will save your lives. It is for you to choose."

He spoke as one who had abandoned hope in this respect; and the rebel's answer justified his attitude.

"I tell you nothing to the enemies of Spain," exclaimed Lorenzo dramatically. "It is their turn to-day; it will be mine to-morrow. They may kill me, but my name remains. It is a name which will yet save my country, señor."

The Governor turned his back upon him angrily.

"And you, señor?" he asked Falconer.

The great hussar drew himself up and replied defiantly:

"General Goya has my answer to that question."

One of the gaolers, who had seen Goya when Falconer struck him, tittered audibly. The Governor of the prison quitted the room pompously.

"Very well," he said; "we will see what sort of a tale you will tell presently."

Grey light, cold and chilling, fell now upon the faces of all in the cell. Some one brought coffee and little glasses of brandy and offered it to the condemned. They drank the liquor eagerly, for their limbs were trembling with the cold. But neither of them touched the hot bread which accompanied it; and when it was carried away, an armourer knelt to strike the fetters from their feet. The blows of his hammer contrasted strangely with the low voice of the monk who recited the Litany. The rolling drums were like the echoes of a storm driven in with the white-crested tide. Falconer had said truly that death was not so terrible as the heralds of death. These shadows, these silent figures, these hooded monks—they struck terror to his very heart. He knew then, for the first time, perhaps, that he must die.

Men realize death but rarely. Sometimes as one lays a head upon a pillow, he will say, The day must come when I shall never rise again. Or a man is joyous of his strength, and rides out to the fields where strength is appraised; and while the cheers of those who watch are in his ears he will tell himself, Some day I shall have ridden for the last time. Again, it may be that the agony of death anticipated wakes a man from his sleep, and he starts up gladly because he still lives. Falconer realized death in none of these forms. The words the priest had spoken were the words which repeated themselves again and again in

his ears. Was it true, then, that when five minutes had passed he would hear the voice of Christ? Would the executioner's hand strip the scales from his eyes and show him the eternal mysteries? Or would he sleep through all the ages? Dread of the eternal stillness brought sweat to his forehead. He saw himself lying still and sleeping in his coffin, and the vision was an agony.

"Courage, Captain! they come for us."

Lorenzo's voice recalled him to the scene. He shut the strange thoughts from his mind and pressed the hand stretched out to him.

"We will go together," he said, "into the darkness."

The doors of the cell were now thrown wide open. A man who wore a black mask over his eyes approached the prisoners to bind their hands. They could see the scaffold rising up as some gloomy mausoleum in the centre of the courtyard upon which the room looked. They knew that the man was the executioner.

"Señores," said he, "forgive me for what I must do."

"Our enemies are not those who obey," answered Lorenzo.

He would have held out his hand to the man, but the impulse took him, and first he kissed Falconer upon both cheeks.

"You have been my friend," he said; "when this is over we will look down upon this prison from the Gate of the Unknown, comrade, and the sun will shine there."

Both stretched out their hands to the executioner, who strapped them together so that they could not

move a finger. A monk, who wore the dreadful grey robe of his miséreri, and whose eyes shone through his mask like the eyes of a dog, came and stood by them and whispered, "Confess, confess; it will save your souls, brothers." A procession was formed and passed slowly to the courtyard. Falconer looked up to the heavens and drops of rain fell upon his face. He was glad that there were clouds in the sky. He did not wish the sun to shine down upon him.

"What shall I confess, father?" he asked impatiently; "that I am tired of life? Will that save my soul?"

"No one is tired of life," whispered the veiled priest, "and you are young. Why should you not speak? you cannot save him. Look, he is on the scaffold already."

The doomed man shuddered. He had turned his eyes away from the place until then; but the priest's words compelled him to look. Even in that gloomy light, the garrotte refused to be hidden. He saw a platform draped with black and a big chair in the centre of it. Behind the chair there stood a high post to which was attached a collar of iron. Falconer had seen such a thing once before in Cuba, when a man sat in the chair and the collar was put about his neck, and the executioner turned the screw which governed the collar, and the man died with scarce the movement of a limb. He fell to wondering if he would suffer any pain. The collar must cut the flesh, he thought. And suffocation had always seemed to him a dreadful death. He feared that he would fight for his life and that they would call him coward.

"Confess, confess! You cannot save him," whispered the priest.

"He does not wish to be saved, my father. There will be no Spaniards where he is going to."

The friar drew yet closer to him.

"Liberty for your secret, brother—they offer it, there is yet time. Liberty and life in your own country. Do you refuse that?"

Falconer shook him off roughly.

"I have answered you," he said.

The bell in the great tower began to toll again. The troops about the scaffold reversed their arms. Lorenzo had mounted the steps, and stood boldly at the rail of the platform.

"I die for Spain," he said dramatically; "to her I leave my name. The day will come when she will honour it. Señores, farewell to you. I do not charge you with this crime. God shall judge between you and me."

He made a step as though to reach the chair, but stood and looked at Falconer.

"Courage, Captain," he said; "it is nothing, this death. My hand shall touch yours just now, and we will go through the darkness together."

He took another step, and again he paused, looking up at the rolling clouds which hid the sun from his sight.

"Lord God," he prayed, "remember the children of Arragon."

It was his only prayer; for when he had uttered it he sat in the chair, and the iron collar was buckled round his neck. For some long seconds the priest's voice alone was audible in the courtyard; but of a sudden the drums rolled again, and the executioner made a sign.

Falconer tried to shut his eyes, but the horror of

the spectacle kept them open. He saw the black figure turn a great handle; he saw the horrible collar close upon the neck of the doomed man; he saw a body, which still quivered, lifted from the chair and laid in a shell awaiting it; he heard the boom of a great cannon, which told San Sebastian that the leader of the rebels was dead.

"Confess, brother," whispered the priest; "they are coming for you."

Falconer pushed the priest back for the second time.

"For God's sake, go!" he cried; "have I not answered you?"

The man persisted.

"Here is the Governor coming to speak to you, my son. Listen to him, and save your soul. The other is in hell—silence can serve him no longer."

The condemned shut his lips to keep back the oath which came to them. The sensations he experienced were not such as he had associated with death. He began to desire the end with a longing which surpassed any wish of life he had ever known. He saw nothing of the moving, busy men around him. One object alone held his eyes—the great garrotte and the masked executioner beside it. If he must die, why wait? he argued. Let it come quickly; if he must go into the unknown darkness, he would go now at once. The moments of delay angered him. He pushed the priest back, and mounted the steps quickly. His curiosity to know, once and for ever, what road lay beyond the grave became almost uncontrollable.

He mounted the scaffold and stood for an instant looking down at the scowling faces of the Spanish

troops below. No prayer was on his lips, but he thought, none the less, of the God who would be revealed to him in an instant of time. When he lifted his eyes to the sky, the refreshing rain fell again upon his face; but the gloom of cloud and mist was unbroken. The thought came to him that his soul would be winged above the cloud anon, and that Lorenzo would call him to the sunshine. They would look down upon the earth together. No limit of vision would hide the things of earth from his sight then. He would see Isabella in her home in the mountains.

"Come," he exclaimed, turning suddenly to the executioner, "why do we wait? Do you not see that I am ready?"

He shuddered as he asked the question, for the body of Lorenzo lay in the shell at his very feet, and his eyes rested for a moment upon the rigid face of his dead friend. The man had suffered, then, he said to himself. Agony was written upon those distorted features. As the one, so must the other be.

"Why do you wait?" he asked; "am I not ready? Is it such hard work, then, to break a man's neck?"

The executioner bowed, and drew back a step from the threatening figure.

"The General must first speak," he said. "I await his command, señor."

A cry almost of suffering burst from the Englishman's lips. He swung round upon his heel to find his old enemy, General Goya, upon the scaffold beside him. For a spell, the two faced each other; one with defiance and hate written upon his pallid face, the other, smiling as though at vengeance gratified. But Falconer was the first to speak.

"It is for you, then, that we wait?" he asked with a sneer. Goya assented ironically.

"You waited for me once before—in Torla, Captain," he said, "and I came to you. The dead are still unburied there, as they are unburied here."

The great hussar drew back a step.

"You come at an opportune time, General—this time my hands are bound, you see."

He held them up, meaning to say, "If they were free, I would strike you again upon the face." Goya in his turn flushed crimson.

"Liar!" he exclaimed; "I will have you beaten with a whip!"

Falconer laughed.

"The whip is your proper weapon, General. In England we put it in the hands of our grooms."

Goya's hand closed upon the wooden railing of the scaffold. The troops said afterwards that he trembled with anger. But he argued with the Englishman no longer.

"It will be three days hence at Madrid," he said to the executioner; "let him be taken back to the cell and the whip made ready. We must teach him manners—at the triangle."

Falconer listened as one who heard some dreadful sentence passed. It was not fear of the whip which terrified him, but fear of the three days he must yet live.

"For God's sake, not that!" he exclaimed.

Goya drew himself up triumphantly.

"When the whip has taught you manners, the garrotte shall send you to practise them in hell—not before, Captain," he said.

The condemned stood a little while as one dazed. Then his courage came back to him.

"The manners of General Goya should be the fashion in the place he speaks of," was his answer.

The troops tittered audibly now. The great bell of San Sebastian had ceased to toll for the dead. An officer gave the order to march, and the companies of infantry left the courtyard with ready steps. But the man, who had lived through the shadow of death, broke down utterly when the truth came to him that there was yet hope of life.

"It shall be now ; by God, I will not wait !" he said, as Goya left the scaffold.

And then he fell fainting, and the sturdy arms of Spanish gaolers carried him back to his cell.

CHAPTER LI

XAMATE WAKES THE PRISONER

DREAMLESS sleep, the sleep of weakness, succeeded to the agony of the scaffold. Through the dreary day of rain and storm, until the darkness had come again, the prisoner lay as one dead. A warder, watching at his side, knelt often to hear if he still breathed.

When night fell at last, and the weary man gave no sign of life or movement, a message was sent to the Governor to ask if he should be waked. For the Englishman compelled those at San Sebastian to anxious moments now. His country had spoken, and Europe knew what Spain would have hidden from her.

"Wake up, Excellency, wake up. Here is your supper. Have you no appetite for that? Mother of God! you sleep like the saints! And it is eight o'clock, Excellency."

Falconer opened his eyes and stared at the stone ceiling above him. His brain played curious tricks with him in that instant of waking. He lived yester-eve over again, and believed that they were waking him because dawn had come.

"Well," he said, sitting upright and staring about him helplessly, "I am quite ready; there is no need to make a fuss."

The man laughed at so good a joke.

"It is your supper, Excellency," he exclaimed, pointing to a dish upon a bare wooden table, and to a bottle beside it. "Fear nothing; they will not come for you to-night, at any rate. *Hombre!* do you take me for the devil in the black mask—and at this hour, too?"

Falconer pressed his hands to his burning head.

"What time did you say it was?" he asked.

"It has just gone eight, Excellency. If you had not slept like a saint, you would have heard the bell strike."

"And this place—where is it?"

The warder shook his head knowingly. He had seen many a prisoner lose his reason at San Sebastian before that day.

"Come, come," he said, "eat your supper, Excellency, and that will make you remember. A dish of fowl and eggs, and a bottle of blanco. Saint John! if they would feed us like that!"

Falconer stared at the supper; the pleasing odour of it awoke him to a sense of great hunger. He drew a chair to the table, and ate ravenously. No food he had ever tasted was half so delicious as that meal in the cell of San Sebastian. And the rich, warm wine! It sent the blood coursing through his veins. It lifted him in an instant to a high place of hope. Life was very well, after all, he thought; and he had three days yet to live!

"Ah," he said, as he drained the cup to the dregs, "if one could be sure of such a draught as that at the beginning of the new journey, it would be easy to die, señor. Of course, I remember now. I am in San Sebastian, but in a different cell—a better cell.

There are chairs here, and the bed is not of straw. A light burns on the table, and the air is fresh. And I have your company, my friend!"

The gaoler, who had turned surly when he saw the food and drink disappear so rapidly, answered with a gesture of despair.

"Saint John!" he said, "it's lucky that you leave us to-night, or you would drink the town dry *caballero*!"

The prisoner twirled his moustache perplexedly.

"Upon my life I'm very sorry," he said; "how greedy of me! Forgive me, señor, and let me make amends when I can. What is this you say about my leaving to-night?"

The man stared at him cunningly.

"Ah," he said, "you are curious, then. You would like me to tell you many things. Thank Heaven, I know my duty, *caballero*! I am not to be bribed."

Falconer ignored the remark.

"There is a glass of wine yet in the bottle," he exclaimed; "pray help yourself, señor."

The fellow drank the wine greedily.

"Your health, Captain. I have said always that you were not as these others. Every one could see that we have a true *caballero* for our guest. And he will not forget his friends. He will write to England, and tell those who wait news of him to give a hundred pesetas to Xamate, the gaoler, who has been kind to him. Is it not so, Excellency?"

"You shall have five hundred, if ever I get to England again," exclaimed Falconer impulsively.

The gaoler made a grimace.

"It is a safe promise—that," said he; "as well say, I will give you a golden house when I get to Madrid."

Santissima Virgen! I grow fat here—on the promises of those whose necks we break. But I am not to be bribed—certainly not. Please to get up, Excellency; the Governor has sent you new clothes, and you are to try them on.”

He crossed the cell, and returned with a suit of black clothes in the fashion of those worn by a Spanish gentleman. To these he added a shirt of fine linen, a heavy cloak, and a *sombrero*. Falconer watched him alternately with indifference and curiosity. That they should dress up a prisoner before sending him to Madrid to break his neck struck him as an idea entirely worthy of the Spaniards.

“Well,” he asked, when the man had tossed the clothes at his feet, “and these are for me?”

“Would they be for any one else, Excellency?”

“I am to put them on now?”

“If you please. The carriage comes at nine o’clock. We must not keep his Excellency waiting.”

“His Excellency! Do you refer to the General?”

The fellow laughed again, knowingly.

“Have a little patience, Captain, and you will see what you will see. Is it not enough that you have eaten a good supper, and that I bring you fine clothes for your back? Leave the rest to God—and to Xamate, who is your friend.”

He pushed the clothes forward impatiently, and Falconer hesitated no more. The mere act of doing something was welcome. And he had stood so near to death that three days of respite appeared to him to be a very lifetime. It was, in some way, pathetic to strip off that besmirched and tattered uniform of white, and to lay it aside tenderly. The very blood upon it recalled that last night in Torla, when he had seen

Isabella's white face at the window of the house. He fell to wondering if any chance would bring them face to face again while he travelled to Madrid. The possibility quickened his hands and sent the blood to his face.

"You see," he said to Xamate, when the five minutes had passed, "I am quite ready. Is there anything else to wait for?"

The gaoler answered him by unlocking the door of the cell and bidding him follow.

"This way, Excellency; we shall find the others at the great gate. Saint John! you make as good a Spaniard as the best of them. It is a promise, mind you—five hundred pesetas to Xamate, who has been your friend, if ever you come to England again."

"A thousand," cried Falconer impatiently, "if you take me from this place at once!"

The man struck a match and lighted his lantern. Then he went quickly down the passage which led to the great courtyard of the prison. When he had unlocked other doors, and two warders with rifles in their hands had posted themselves on either side of the prisoner, the little procession passed on to the rampart gate of the citadel, whereby stood the Governor of San Sebastian—alone and impatient for the advent of the Englishman.

"Captain," said the Governor, stepping forward quickly as Falconer came up, "you know that you are to go to Madrid."

"I have imagined it, señor."

The Governor hesitated. He desired to excuse himself, but the precise words failed him.

"It is possible, señor, that you will be questioned

at no distant day concerning your treatment in this prison," he continued with difficulty. "In whatever report you may feel called upon to give, I ask you earnestly to remember that I am the servant, and not the master, here!"

"I shall not forget it, señor. The name of Goya, the assassin, will long be remembered by me, I assure you."

The Governor bit his lips.

"I say nothing against the General—remember that," he exclaimed.

"It is evident that words fail you," was the retort.

Both were silent for a spell. Perhaps the Governor would have spoken again had not the sound of wheels beyond the gate cut short his intentions.

"Here is his Excellency," he cried, as the iron doors swung open; "he has come to take you to Madrid, señor. I leave my honour in your hands—in the hands of an honourable Englishman."

Falconer smiled in spite of himself.

"I am not quite strong enough for burdens, señor," he answered good-humouredly; "and besides, my friendship must be worth little to you."

"We shall see, Captain. Be pleased to enter the carriage. His Excellency is waiting."

A carriage drawn by two horses was driven into the courtyard while they spoke. Falconer saw a cloaked figure in the carriage, and observed that the Governor bowed low when he addressed his visitor. He thought for a moment it was Goya; but when the new-comer spoke he knew that he had never heard his voice before.

"Pray enter, Captain; I am waiting for you."

The prisoner entered and seated himself on the front

seat of the landau. The Governor raised his hat, and the horses started at a trot down the steep hill to the town. It was in Falconer's mind that they were driving to the nearest railway station to begin their journey to Madrid. Yet who the man was, and why the Governor treated him with such respect, he could not imagine. Nor did the stranger enlighten him at once. They were already far from San Sebastian, out, indeed, upon the hilly road to the North, before a single word passed between them. The darkness of the carriage, and of the roads by which they drove, hid the man's face from Falconer's sight. Once when a bright beam of light struck through the window from the open door of an inn he had a vision of a figure wrapped in heavy furs, and of a pair of searching eyes which regarded him with considerable amusement. And he did not fail to notice that there was but one man upon the box of the carriage.

"Señor," he said at last, when his tongue would be still no longer, "does it not occur to you that our conversation is very instructive?"

Ribera—for it was the Minister of the Interior who rode with the prisoner in the carriage—laughed softly.

"Captain Falconer," he said, in excellent French, "I am really a very bad host. I should have asked you before if you object to smoking."

"Object to smoking! What a question to put to a man who has just come from a dungeon and has three days to live!"

Ribera continued to smile. At the same time he took a cigar case from his pocket.

"Let me offer you a cigar, Captain. There is some time yet before we sup. And that is a *puro*."

He thrust an excellent Havanah cigar into the

astonished prisoner's hand, and struck a match upon a golden box. Falconer, in the moment that the match burned, saw a face which was lit up by humour and content. It seemed, indeed, like the face of a friend. And the cigar! He swore by all the gods that it was as good as a year of life to him.

"Come," he said, a little petulantly, "this is all very well, señor. But if it is the beginning of your joke——"

Ribera put his hand upon the other's arm.

"If it is the beginning of a joke," said he, "let us agree that it begins with a very good cigar."

Falconer laughed in his turn.

"Certainly," he said, "I admit that. And when the cigar is done?"

"When it is done, Captain, we shall be at the frontier."

For an instant a tremendous hope sent the blood coursing through the prisoner's veins. The frontier—there was freedom beyond that. Was it possible! But he would not think of it. Ribera, meanwhile, had become more serious. He unloosed his cape and sat up in the carriage.

"Captain," he said, "let us talk seriously a little while; and forgive me if I speak to you as to a friend of Spain. The circumstances under which you came to my country are now well known to me. I do not think they need make you out to be the enemy either of Her Majesty the Queen or of her Government. Am I right in that supposition?"

Falconer shifted uneasily on his seat. He had little cleverness of speech, and did not shine in arguments of a serious order.

"Well," he said hesitatingly, "I suppose you are right. To tell you the blunt truth, I don't care a scudo either way. King or queen—you may have a dozen if you please!"

"God forbid!" muttered Ribera fervently, but he smiled in spite of himself.

"I am glad that you are frank with me," he continued, presently; "let me be equally frank with you. If it should happen that a knowledge of your opinions helped the Queen to grant you a free pardon when we arrive—er—in Madrid, Captain, I am to take it that you would have no complaint to make against the Government of the country—that you would not think of returning here with new political aims? Is that a correct view, my friend?"

The perspiration stood on Falconer's brow now. A voice whispered to him: He is stating conditions. His answer was earnest beyond the chance of question.

"If ever I get out of this cursed country," he exclaimed impulsively, "I would not return for all the gold in your mint."

Ribera puffed leisurely at his cigar.

"That would not be a large amount in our present financial circumstances," he said decisively. "*Mais arrivons*, Captain, if, in the unlikely case I am supposing, Her Majesty granted you a free pardon, you would not feel called upon, when you returned to England, to say anything which would make your fellow-countrymen forget the friendship they have for us?"

The answer came unhesitatingly.

"I should consider myself in honour bound to silence, señor."

"I have your word for that?"

"You have my word."

"Then there is nothing more to discuss, Captain, for here is the frontier, and here we sup."

CHAPTER LII

TO THE GATES OF DAY

THE carriage stopped abruptly as Ribera spoke. Some one came to the door—a fat, squat man with eyes like the eyes of a pig. He bowed almost to the ground when the Spanish Minister alighted. His welcome to Falconer was scarcely less gracious.

“My house is at the disposal of your Excellencies,” he exclaimed, and this assurance he repeated as he conducted them to the door of a little inn standing back some way from a rugged mountain road. Ribera paid no attention to him whatever. He walked straight to the door of the hostelry and drew his cloak about his face that none might recognise him. Falconer, in his turn, stood a moment to ask himself where they were, and how this could be the road to Madrid. Everywhere about him he saw the shapes of mountains standing up clear and bold in the moonlight. An intense stillness of night prevailed upon the lonely road. The storm of morning had passed. The air was cold and invigorating as the freshest breezes of the sea. It stimulated the prisoner, and filled his lungs as with a new power of life and strength. It brought the dream of his liberty closer to him. He could have wished to live if it were but through one night of such a scene as the desolate mountains gave him.

Though he knew it not, his companion had brought him to a little hillside station on the very frontier line dividing Spain from France. Here was the "Inn of the Two White Crosses," a house much frequented by travellers in the days before the great railway to Madrid. You had but to drive a hundred yards down the mountain road to find the custom-house; a league or more away was the little French town of St. Jean. The hostelry, indeed, stood upon that spur of the Pyrenees which dips down into the sea between San Sebastian and Biarritz. Woodlanders and wild fellows from the hills were its principal customers. Smugglers found there a haven from the civil guards. The last person one would have sought within its portals was a member of the Spanish Cabinet and his English prisoner.

Ribera entered the *fonda*, however, as though all was known about his coming. He went straight to a little room at the back of the kitchen, and the prisoner followed him wonderingly. When he had shut the door of the room, and a savoury supper steamed upon the table, he invited Falconer to take a seat and to fill his glass with wine.

"Come," he said, presently, "a good thing is always worth doing twice, Captain. I know that you have supped already with our friend, the Governor. Forget the fact, and do me the honour to taste that wine. It is the true *secho de Xerez*. We can talk about the documents afterwards."

Falconer emptied a long glass of the powerful yellow wine; but he was too excited to think of eating, and could not make even a pretence to imitate his host.

"Señor," he said pleasantly, "your country is too

generous. Forgive me if I have some regard for the bond-holders. Two suppers to a prisoner on his way to the scaffold ! It is a national extravagance. But I am quite ready to speak about any documents, if you have any to discuss with me."

"I have one, Captain Falconer ; it is the document upon which your pardon may depend."

"My pardon, señor ?"

"As I say, your pardon. I do not doubt that if you sign the paper I shall put before you presently, Her Majesty will listen favourably to anything I may have to say."

Falconer buried his face in his hands. His cheeks were burning. "Liberty ! Liberty !" was the word which kept echoing in his ears.

"And you ?" he asked, after a moment's silence, "you are—— ?"

"I am Gaspar de Ribera, the Minister of the Interior."

Again there was a spell of silence. Ribera continued to eat like a hungry man. The great hussar filled himself a second glass of wine with a trembling hand.

"This paper," he blurted out, presently, "is it anything against my honour or the honour of my country ?"

Ribera smiled.

"We know you better than that, Captain."

"Then it is a promise for future good behaviour ?"

"Scarcely. I would not say it does not imply such a promise, but it goes further. To be brief, Captain, it is the written record of that which you avowed just now—your public declaration that you

have no concern in my country's politics, and that you have been well treated in San Sebastian."

Falconer laughed contemptuously.

"Your Government is not moral, señor; it offers a direct encouragement to liars."

"All Governments do."

"And I am to sign these lies?"

"Yes, if you wish to return to your own country again. There is no alternative. It is the condition of your liberty. Surely you would not hesitate, Captain! If anyone has ill-treated you, believe me that he has acted against the orders sent from Madrid. They were positive orders. Your grievance lies against the man who disobeyed them, not against the Government of Spain."

For a little while they wrangled. But the trained logic of Ribera quickly prevailed above a soldier's scruples. Falconer signed the document after his third glass of sherry, and tossed it disdainfully upon the table.

"You are right, señor. My grievance is against the assassin Goya. God help him if ever he sets foot in England!"

"Amen to that," said Ribera, as he folded up the document and put it carefully in his pocket; "our friend will need a good many prayers when the day comes. Let us forgive him meanwhile, Captain, and remember our carriage is waiting at the door of the inn. If there is anything else to discuss, we can recall it as we go."

"To Madrid?" asked the Englishman earnestly.

Ribera turned on him those cunning eyes of his, and answered in one word:

"Perhaps."

There were many people at the door of the inn when they passed out—grooms with lanterns in their hands; rugged fellows come down from the hills to see what the fuss was about; even cavalry-men waiting to escort the Spanish Minister to the capital. Falconer told himself, as he stood waiting for his host in the courtyard, that these lancers must have ridden with his carriage from San Sebastian, though he had not seen them. The noise and confusion at the door of the *fonda* made him dizzy. He tried to think of that which had passed in the room *là bas*, but could make nothing of it. He was living in some new world of thought, of which the people and the scenes were unreal. If there were minutes when a sweet voice whispered in his ears the words "Liberty and life," he tried to silence the voice, saying, "It is impossible." He had suffered much; that hour of liberty set him craving for England with a longing surpassing anything he had ever known. He thought even of Isabella, and remembered the days of their happiness in Paris. She, alone in all Europe, could be thinking of him in friendship that night. Or had they told her that he was dead!

A voice recalled him from these profitless reflections. He looked up to see the carriage in the courtyard and a groom at the door of it waiting for him to enter. Ribera was not at his side at the moment, but he could distinguish a figure in the carriage; and imagining it to be that of the Spanish Minister, he entered without more ado, and the door was shut quickly. Then some one cried out, *Vaya usted*; the horses broke into a canter; the journey began.

Strong as the hussar was, the uncertainty of the

night, following upon his sufferings in San Sebastian, had worn him out. He sank into the luxurious cushions as into a bed of down. That curious sentimentality of thought, which fatigue often brings, sent his mind back to the gardens about Paris, and to the hour when he had first known that Isabella loved him. He saw her in imagination with the sunshine upon her sweet face; he remembered what her words had meant to him, the outcast and the exile. How, he asked himself, if some miracle could send her back to him in that hour of his ultimate solitude. A dream of folly, indeed! A dream from which a man might well awake with tears in his eyes.

He laughed at himself, and at these childish thoughts, and turned to his companion for the first time since they had left the inn.

"Senor," he said, "forgive me, I believe that I have been asleep!"

No answer came. He sat up and stared at the figure by his side. In response to his cry of wonder two little hands were stretched out and locked in his. He felt warm breath upon his cheek. Gentle arms were put about his neck; a hot face burned against his own; he heard a low sound, as of a woman weeping in the supreme hour of her joy.

"My God!" he cried, "it cannot be—my eyes are blind—Isabella, speak to me!"

She answered him by drawing his face down to her and kissing him upon the forehead.

"Noel!" she whispered, "at last—at last!"

He did not ask why or how, but pressed his lips to hers in a long embrace. No other word was spoken, no explanation sought. The dawn light, falling grey

and cold upon her face, found his arms still about her neck. And they had crossed the frontier then ; and the Spain of their misfortunes lay beyond the mountains.

CHAPTER LIII

CARNIVAL AT MONT-ST.-JEAN

SOME three miles from Bayonne, upon the mountain road which lies between that city and the Spanish frontier, there is a little church dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. It lies snug on the hills, with fertile glades and valleys about it, and many a vineyard and many a fair garden of sunny France for its ramparts. Few knew its name or that of its gracious old priest, for rare is the day when the passing traveller thinks it worthy of remark or knocks upon the door of its presbytery in search of hospitality. Should such a day come, the news goes abroad as the news of wonder or calamity. Peasants gather at the church door to discuss it. The good curé is the subject of a hundred questions. Men date their affairs from the hour of such a happening.

Of all such events of which the peasants love to speak, and they are very few, none is so well remembered to-day as the event of a memorable morning early in the month of January in the year of the rebellion, when, almost with the sun, a carriage, which had just crossed the Spanish frontier, stopped at the presbytery, and strangers descended at the old priest's house. No man, no woman, scarce a child in all that hamlet but can tell you of a circumstance so remarkable. How the news spread! How the villagers,

flocking to Mass, quickened their steps and cried the thing to all they passed! How they wondered when the padre delayed to come in at the usual time of service! What food for gossip they espied when at last he did enter the church, and there followed at his heels an Englishman of prodigious height and build, and a queenly girl to whom every woman's heart went out at once. A marriage! Blessed Mary Magdalene, as the old crones exclaimed, nothing like it had ever been seen or heard in that place within the memory of men.

The strangers came to the church, and when the old priest had married them, they entered their carriage again, and were driven away at a gallop towards Bayonne. But first they scattered a good handful of silver to the wild company which was the witness of their nuptials; and all that day and all that night the hamlet of Mont-St.-Jean, as the village was called, drank the good white wine and blessed the hands that gave it. Never had the host of La Maison Rouge known such a carnival. Even the old priest came down from his house and condescended to discuss it with his flock.

"Surely, my children, God has been good to us this day. Five hundred francs for the altar, and five hundred for our poor. It is a miracle! The blessed Mary Magdalene has interceded for us. I should not wonder to hear that she sent an angel to us!"

"St. John, she was an angel with red lips, my father. Did you see milord Englishman kissing her in the carriage? And she wore the shoes of Paris. I could swear to them, and to her pretty feet. God send us such an angel every day."

The old priest shook his head good-humouredly. One of those listening to him, a substantial wine-grower—and, as every one said, the devil of a smuggler—asked a question of a more practical nature.

“Do you know anything of them, father?”

The priest raised his finger warningly and drew the fellow into a corner.

“It is the Englishman, sir milord Falconer, and the woman is Isabella de Gavarnie. You have heard of him, my son—the great rebel of Arragon, who was to die at San Sebastian yesterday. But these Spaniards are cowards. They fear the English—they are a nation of rats. Yesterday, Ribera, their Minister, went to San Sebastian and brought milord to the frontier. The English Queen had spoken, and he was afraid. *Ma foi!* I do not wonder. What a man to see! What limbs! What height!”

The wine-grower sighed.

“Say, rather, ‘What a woman!’ padre. Did you see her eyes when she stood at the altar? It is a good thing you made them man and wife.”

The old priest laughed.

“My son,” he said, “a little charity, I beseech you. God’s blessing be upon them and upon their children’s children. Let us drink the good wine they leave us. We shall never see such a day at Mont-St.-Jean again.”

He called for a bottle of white wine and gave them the toast:

“Milord Anglais.”

It was a welcome word, and all the company rose to cheer the stranger who thus had brought carnival to

them in the bitter days of winter. And when the toast was drunk, a sly fellow cried :

“ And here’s to the red lips of madame.”

There was not a man in the company who did not fill his glass at that appeal.

CHAPTER LIV

THE LAST OF THE WHITE HUSSARS

UPON an evening of July, six months after the rebel, Lorenzo de la Cruz, had died in the prison of San Sebastian, an Englishman, mounted upon an ambling white horse, rode out leisurely from the hamlet of Jaca towards the mountain town of Torla. He had for companion a white-haired old Spaniard, whom he called Damien; and he rode as one who wishes to observe and to carry away fruit of his observation. Scarce a house upon that road which had not interest for him, scarce a thicket or a hill which did not prompt him to a question. When, ultimately, he reached the amphitheatre of mountains in the heart of which Torla lies, he drew rein to study the scene more closely, and to make a note of the answers which the old guide returned to his searching interrogation.

"Yonder on the hill, old man—was that the house of Lorenzo himself?"

"No other, Excellency; that is the house of my master. God rest his soul! there is scarce left one stone upon another."

"And it was here, in this valley, that the last stand was made?"

The old man doffed his hat reverently.

"Here lie the bravest sons of Spain, señor—the

White Hussars of Gavarnie. We shall never see their like again."

The Englishman smiled at his enthusiasm.

"They fought well, you say?"

"Like devils, Excellency! Let it be recorded when you come to write your book of which you make mention. Say that Spain in her heart of hearts honours them, and carries their memory in her affections. Say that the day will come when she will avenge them!"

The stranger looked at the old man very curiously.

"How?" he asked. "You believe that the Phantom Army is not done with?"

Señor Damien's eyes lighted up with a strange fire at this question.

"No movement is done with which is built upon a people's sympathy, Excellency. And Lorenzo lives in our hearts, and will live always. Write that down if you wish to tell the story of the rebellion. Say that I, Damien, was the servant of one whose name has its place for ever in the history of my country. Faithful in his life, I am faithful in death. Do me justice, señor, and let my name be written in your book."

The Englishman heard him with obvious amusement.

"Are there others in this town of Torla as faithful as you, old man?"

Old Damien sighed.

"The heart is willing, but the flesh is weak, Excellency, and the civil guards are everywhere. How shall we speak of these things with bayonets at our throats? Yet the day will come! And there is one even in Torla who has not forgotten—one White Hussar still rides the hills, Excellency. Look up—

you will see her on the hillside yonder! God pity her! She seeks the man her eyes will never behold again!"

He pointed up to the forest-capped heights; and there, at the thicket's edge, was an apparition which might well have moved that ignorant peasantry to awe. For a woman rode the heights, and a superb black horse carried her, and her bodice of white cloth was laced with gold, as the uniform of the man she had loved; and in her pretty cap there waved a plume of feathers, and the sword of the dead Lorenzo de la Cruz was girded at her waist. Fearlessly she rode at the very edge of the outstanding wall of rock; the red light of the setting sun fell picturesquely upon her childish face, and shot a thousand dazzling rays from the shimmering scabbard and the steel of that caparison. In all Spain the Englishman had seen nothing more picturesque, nothing to win his admiration so ungrudgingly.

"Your White Hussar, who remembers Lorenzo, is a woman, then, Señor Damien?"

The old man watched the girl disappear in the wood before the great cave of Torla, and then answered:

"It is Giralda, the gipsy, Excellency—the bravest heart in Spain. Remember her with reverence when you write your work. She loved my master—ay, God knows how well! She will wait for him here in these mountains until the end, señor."

He doffed his cap again toward the distant woods, and then exclaimed:

"Men wage the wars, but the women pay the price, Excellency. Let us forget a thing so sorrowful, and hasten, or night will trap us in the hills."

He put spurs to his horse, and began to trot down the road. The Englishman followed him, but his eyes were still turned toward that place where the last of the White Hussars had drawn rein to watch him.

THE END

NOVEMBER, 1898.

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